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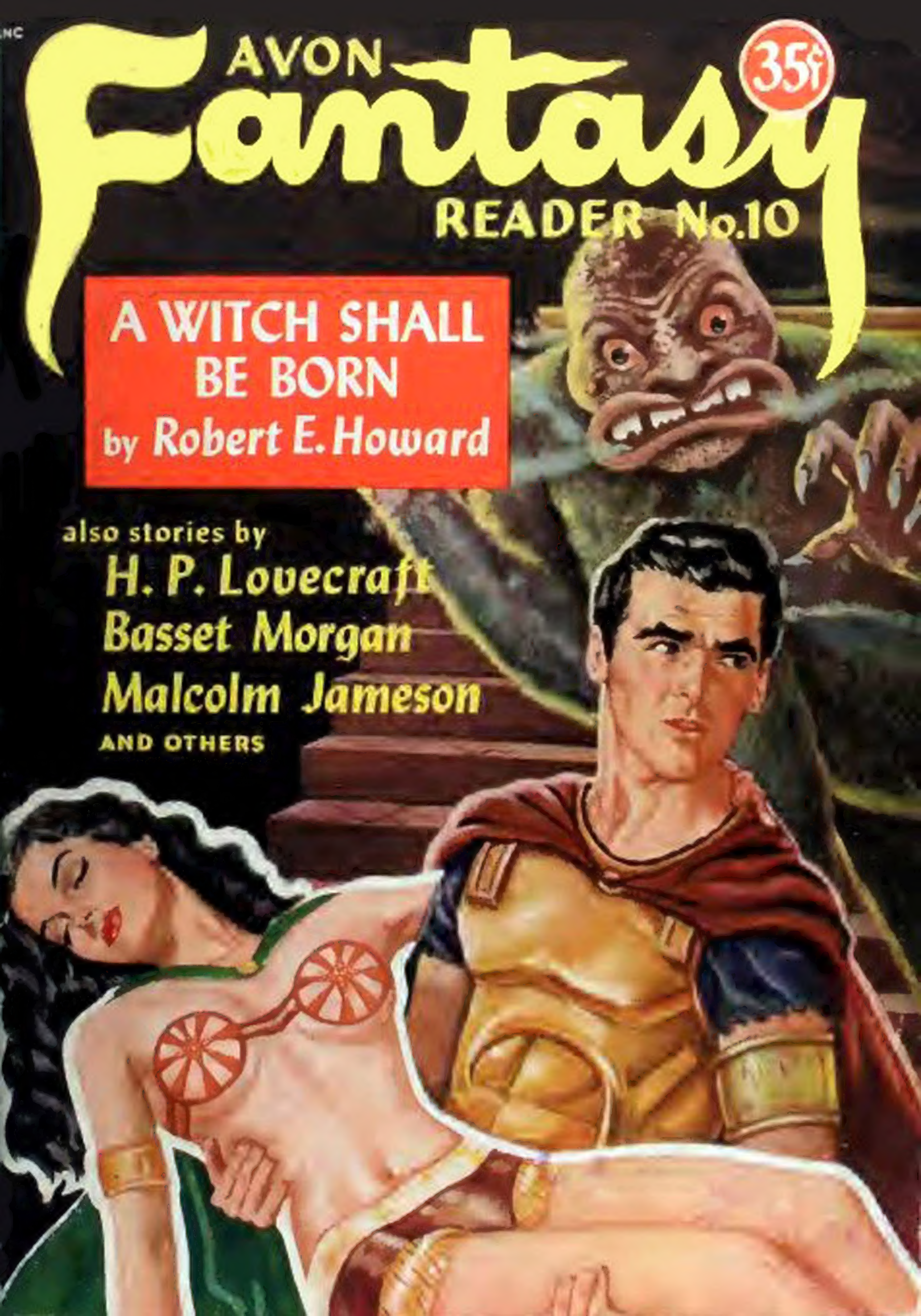
A WITCH SHALL BE BORN

by Robert E. Howard

also stories by

H. P. Lovecraft
Basset Morgan
Malcolm Jameson
AND OTHERS



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— D.A.W.

AVON

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No. 10

Edited by
DONALD A. WOLLHEIM

Stories by

ROBERT E. HOWARD • BASSETT MORGAN
H. P. LOVECRAFT • MALCOLM JAMESON
DONALD A. WOLLHEIM • FRANCIS FLAGG
MILES J. BREUER • AMELIA REYNOLDS LONG

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A Witch Shall Be Born

by Robert E. Howard

Robert E. Howard's stories of the wanderings of Conan the Cimmerian through the realms of the pre-Glacial era were based upon a carefully constructed "history" of those ages devised by Howard before starting his series. It is, we think, this careful groundwork which makes these tales so colorfully realistic, so vivid, so varied in background. We sense that he has woven into his literary tapestry not merely varicolored threads but cloths of different textures, so that his prehistoric kingdoms are national not merely because he calls them by different names but because he has thought of them as different in culture, approach, tradition. This is no mean feat for a purely imaginary world and it is one of the things that have made Robert Howard's stories so much more memorable than attempts at similar construction by more commercially slanted writers.

1. *The Blood-Red Crescent*

TARAMIS, Queen of Khauran, awakened from a dream-haunted slumber to a silence that seemed more like the stillness of nighted catacombs than the normal quiet of a sleeping palace. She lay staring into the darkness, wondering why the candles in their golden candelabra had gone out. A flecking of stars marked a gold-barred casement that lent no illumination to the interior of the chamber. But as Taramis lay there, she became aware of a spot of radiance glowing in the darkness before her. She watched, puzzled. It grew and its intensity deepened as it expanded, a widening disk of lurid light hovering against the dark velvet hangings of the opposite wall. Taramis caught her breath, starting up to a sitting position. A dark object was visible in that circle of light—*a human head.*

In a sudden panic the queen opened her lips to cry out for her maids; then she checked herself. The glow was more lurid, the head more vividly limned. It was a woman's head, small, delicately molded, superbly poised, with a high-piled mass of lustrous black hair. The face grew distinct as she stared—and it was the sight of this face which froze the cry in Taramis' throat. The features were her own! She might have been looking into a mirror which subtly altered her reflection, lending it a tigerish gleam of eye, a vindictive curl of lip.

"Ishtar!" gasped Taramis. "I am bewitched!"

Appallingly, the apparition spoke, and its voice was like honeyed venom. "Bewitched? No, sweet sister! Here is no sorcery."

"Sister?" stammered the bewildered girl. "I have no sister."

"You never had a sister?" came the sweet, poisonously mocking voice. "Never a twin sister whose flesh was as soft as yours to caress or hurt?"

"Why, once I had a sister," answered Taramis, still convinced that she was in the grip of some sort of nightmare. "But she died."

The beautiful face in the disk was convulsed with the aspect of a fury; so hellish became its expression that Taramis, cowering back, half expected to see snaky locks writhe hissing about the ivory brow.

"You lie!" The accusation was spat from between the snarling red lips. "She did not die! Fool! Oh, enough of this mummery! Look—and let your sight be blasted!"

Light ran suddenly along the hangings like flaming serpents, and incredibly the candles in the golden sticks flared up again. Taramis crouched on her velvet couch, her lithe legs flexed beneath her, staring wide-eyed at the pantherish figure which posed mockingly before her. It was as if she gazed upon another Taramis, identical with herself in every contour of feature and limb, yet animated by an alien and evil personality. The face of this stranger waif reflected the opposite of every characteristic the countenance of the queen denoted. Lust and mystery sparkled in her scintillant eyes, cruelty lurked in the curl of her full red lips. Each movement of her supple body was subtly suggestive. Her coiffure imitated that of the queen's, on her feet were gilded sandals such as Taramis wore in her boudoir. The sleeveless, low-necked silk tunic, girdled at the waist with a cloth-of-gold cincture, was a duplicate of the queen's night garment.

"Who are you?" gasped Taramis, an icy chill she could not explain creeping along her spine. "Explain your presence before I call my ladies-in-waiting to summon the guard!"

"Scream until the roof-beams crack," callously answered the stranger. "Your sluts will not wake till dawn, though the palace spring into flames about them. Your guardsmen will not hear your squeals; they have been sent out of this wing of the palace."

"What!" exclaimed Taramis, stiffening with outraged majesty. "Who dared give my guardsmen such a command?"

"I did, sweet sister," sneered the other girl. "A little while ago, before I entered. They thought it was their darling adored queen. Ha! How beautifully I acted the part! With what imperious dignity, softened by womanly sweetness, did I address the great louts who knelt in their armor and plumed helmets!"

Taramis felt as if a stifling net of bewilderment were being drawn about her.

"Who are you?" she cried desperately. "What madness is this? Why do you come here?"

"Who am I?" There was the spite of a she-cobra's hiss in the soft response. The girl stepped to the edge of the couch, grasped the queen's white shoulders with fierce fingers, and bent to glare full into the startled eyes of Taramis. And under the spell of that hypnotic glare, the queen forgot to resent the unprecedented outrage of violent hands laid on regal flesh.

"Fool!" gritted the girl between her teeth. "Can you ask? Can you wonder? I am Salome!"

"Salome!" Taramis breathed the word, and the hairs prickled on her scalp as she realized the incredible, numbing truth of the statement. "I thought you died within the hour of your birth," she said feebly.

"So thought many," answered the woman who called herself Salome. "They carried me into the desert to die, damn them! I, a mewing, puling babe whose life was so young it was scarcely the flicker of a candle. And do you know why they bore me forth to die?"

"I—I have heard the story——" faltered Taramis.

Salome laughed fiercely, and slapped her bosom. The low-necked tunic left the upper parts of her firm breasts bare, and between them there shone a curious mark—a crescent, red as blood.

"The mark of the witch!" cried Taramis, recoiling.

"Aye!" Salome's laughter was dagger-edged with hate. "The curse of the kings of Khauran! Aye, they tell the tale in the market-places, with wagging beards and rolling eyes, the pious fools! They tell how the first queen of our line had traffic with a fiend of darkness and bore him a daughter who lives in foul legendry to this day. And thereafter in each century a girl baby was born into the Askhaurian dynasty, with a scarlet half-moon between her breasts, that signified her destiny.

" 'Every century a witch shall be born.' So ran the ancient curse. And so it has come to pass. Some were slain at birth, as they sought to slay me. Some walked the earth as witches, proud daughters of Khauran, with the moon of hell burning upon their ivory bosoms. Each was named Salome. I too am Salome. It was always Salome, the witch. It will always be Salome, the witch, even when the mountains of ice have roared down from the pole and ground the civilizations to ruin, and a new world has risen from the ashes and dust—even then there shall be Salomes to walk the earth, to trap men's hearts by their sorcery, to dance before the kings of the world, and see the heads of the wise men fall at their pleasure."

"But—but you——" stammered Taramis.

"I?" The scintillant eyes burned like dark fires of mystery. "They carried me into the desert far from the city, and laid me naked on the hot sand, under the flaming sun. And then they rode away and left me for the jackals and the vultures and the desert wolves.

"But the life in me was stronger than the life in common folk, for it partakes of the essence of the forces that seethe in the black gulfs beyond mortal ken. The hours passed, and the sun slashed down like the molten flames of hell, but I did not die—aye, something of that torment I remember, faintly and far away, as one remembers a dim, formless dream. Then there were camels, and yellow-skinned men who wore silk robes and spoke in a weird tongue. Strayed from the caravan road, they passed close by, and their leader saw me, and recognized the scarlet crescent on my bosom. He took me up and gave me life.

"He was a magician from far Khitai, returning to his native kingdom after a journey to Stygia. He took me with him to purple-towered Paikang, its minarets rising amid the vine-festooned jungles of bamboo, and there I grew to womanhood under his teaching. Age had steeped him deep in black wisdom, not weakened his powers of evil. Many things he taught me——"

She paused, smiling enigmatically, with wicked mystery gleaming in her dark eyes. Then she tossed her head.

"He drove me from him at last, saying that I was but a common witch in spite of his teachings, and not fit to command the mighty sorcery he would have taught me. He would have made me queen of the world and ruled the nations through me, he said, but I was only a harlot of darkness. But what of it? I could never endure to seclude myself in a golden tower, and spend the long hours staring into a crystal globe, mumbling over incantations written on serpent's skin in the blood of virgins, poring over musty volumes in forgotten languages.

"He said I was but an earthly sprite, knowing naught of the deeper gulfs of cosmic sorcery. Well, this world contains all I desire—power, and pomp, and glittering pageantry, handsome men and soft women for my paramours and my slaves. He had told me who I was, of the curse and my heritage. I have returned to take that to which I have as much right as you. Now it is mine by right of possession."

"What do you mean?" Taramis sprang up and faced her sister, stung out of her bewilderment and fright. "Do you imagine that by drugging a few of my maids and tricking a few of my guardsmen you have established a claim to the throne of Khauran? Do not forget that *I* am queen of Khauran! I shall give you a place of honor, as my sister, but——"

Salome laughed hatefully.

"How generous of you, dear, sweet sister! But before you begin putting me in my place—perhaps you will tell me whose soldiers camp in the plain outside the city walls?"

"They are the Shemitish mercenaries of Constantius, the Kothic *voivode* of the Free Companies."

"And what do they in Khauran?" cooed Salome.

Taramis felt that she was being subtly mocked, but she answered with an assumption of dignity which she scarcely felt.

"Constantius asked permission to pass along the borders of Khauran on his way to Turan. He himself is hostage for their good behavior as long as they are within my domains."

"And Constantius," pursued Salome. "Did he not ask your hand today?"

Taramis shot her a clouded glance of suspicion.

"How did you know that?"

An insolent shrug of the slim naked shoulders was the only reply.

"You refused, dear sister?"

"Certainly I refused!" exclaimed Taramis angrily. "Do you, an Askhaurian princess yourself, suppose that the queen of Khauran could treat such a proposal with anything but disdain? Wed a bloody-handed adventurer, a man exiled from his own kingdom because of his crimes, and the leader of organized plunderers and hired murderers?

"I should never have allowed him to bring his black-bearded slayers into Khauran. But he is virtually a prisoner in the south tower, guarded by my soldiers. Tomorrow I shall bid him order his troops to leave the kingdom. He himself shall be kept captive until they are over the border. Meantime, my soldiers man the walls of the city, and I have warned him that he will answer for any outrages perpetrated on the villagers or shepherds by his mercenaries."

"He is confined in the south tower?" asked Salome.

"That is what I said. Why do you ask?"

For answer Salome clapped her hands, and lifting her voice, with a gurgle of cruel mirth in it, called: "The queen grants you an audience, Falcon!"

A gold-arabesqued door opened and a tall figure entered the chamber, at the sight of which Taramis cried out in amazement and anger.

"Constantius! You dare enter my chamber!"

"As you see, Your Majesty!" He bent his dark, hawk-like head in mock humility.

Constantius, whom men called Falcon, was tall, broad-shouldered, slim-waisted, lithe and strong as pliant steel. He was handsome in an aquiline, ruthless way. His face was burnt dark by the sun, and his hair, which grew far back from his high, narrow forehead, was black as a raven. His dark eyes were penetrating and alert, the hardness of his thin lips not softened by his thin black mustache. His boots were of Kordavan leather, his hose and doublet of plain, dark silk, tarnished with the wear of the camps and the stains of armor rust.

Twisting his mustache, he let his gaze travel up and down the shrinking queen with an effrontery that made her wince.

"By Ishtar, Taramis," he said silkily, "I find you more alluring in your night-tunic than in your queenly robes. Truly, this is an auspicious night!"

Fear grew in the queen's dark eyes. She was no fool; she knew that Constantius would never dare this outrage unless he was sure of himself.

"You are mad!" she said. "If I am in your power in this chamber, you are no less in the power of my subjects, who will rend you to pieces if you touch me. Go at once, if you would live."

Both laughed mockingly, and Salome made an impatient gesture.

"Enough of this farce; let us on to the next act in the comedy. Listen, dear sister: it was I who sent Constantius here. When I decided to take the throne of Khauran, I cast about for a man to aid me, and chose the Falcon, because of his utter lack of all characteristics men call good."

"I am overwhelmed, princess," murmured Constantius sardonically, with a profound bow.

"I sent him to Khauran, and, once his men were camped in the plain outside and he was in the palace, I entered the city by that small gate in the west wall—the fools guarding it thought it was you returning from some nocturnal adventure——"

"You hell-cat!" Taramis' cheeks flamed and her resentment got the better of her regal reserve.

Salome smiled hardly.

"They were properly surprised and shocked, but admitted me without question. I entered the palace the same way, and gave the order to the surprised guards that sent them marching away, as well as the men who guarded Constantius in the south tower. Then I came here, attending to the ladies-in-waiting on the way."

Taramis' fingers clenched and she paled.

"Well, what next?" she asked in a shaky voice.

"Listen!" Salome inclined her head. Faintly through the casement there came the clank of marching men in armor; gruff voices shouted in an alien tongue, and cries of alarm mingled with the shouts.

"The people awaken and grow fearful," said Constantius sardonically. "You had better go and reassure them, Salome!"

"Call me Taramis," answered Salome. "We must become accustomed to it."

"What have you done?" cried Taramis. "What have you done?"

"I have gone to the gates and ordered the soldiers to open them," answered Salome. "They were astounded, but they obeyed. That is the Falcon's army you hear, marching into the city."

"You devil!" cried Taramis. "You have betrayed my people, in my guise! You have made me seem a traitor! Oh, I shall go to them——"

With a cruel laugh Salome caught her wrist and jerked her back. The magnificent suppleness of the queen was helpless against the vindictive strength that steeled Salome's slender limbs.

"You know how to reach the dungeons from the palace, Constantius?" said the witch-girl. "Good. Take this spitfire and lock her into the strongest cell. The jailers are all sound in drugged sleep. I saw to that. Send a man to cut their throats before they can awaken. None must ever know what has occurred tonight. Thenceforward I am Taramis, and Taramis is a nameless prisoner in an unknown dungeon."

Constantius smiled with a glint of strong white teeth under his thin mustache.

"Very good, but you would not deny me a little—ah—amusement first?"

"Not I! Tame the scornful hussy as you will." With a wicked laugh Salome flung her sister into the Kothian's arms, and turned away through the door that opened into the outer corridor.

Fright widened Taramis' lovely eyes, her supple figure rigid and straining against Constantius' embrace. She forgot the men marching in the streets, forgot the outrage to her queenship, in the face of the menace to her womanhood. She forgot all sensations but terror and shame as she faced the complete cynicism of Constantius' burning, mocking eyes, felt his hard arms crushing her writhing body.

Salome, hurrying along the corridor outside, smiled spitefully as a scream of despair and agony rang shuddering through the palace.

2. *The Tree of Death*

The young soldier's hose and shirt were smeared with dried blood, wet with sweat and gray with dust. Blood oozed from the deep gash in his thigh, from the cuts on his breast and shoulder. Perspiration glistened on his livid face and his fingers were knotted in the cover of the divan on which he lay. Yet his words reflected mental suffering that outweighed physical pain.

"She must be mad!" he repeated again and again, like one still stunned by some monstrous and incredible happening. "It's like a nightmare! Taramis, whom all Khauran loves, betraying her people to that devil from Koth! Oh, Ishtar, why was I not slain? Better die than live to see our queen turn traitor and harlot!"

"Lie still, Valerius," begged the girl who was washing and bandaging his wounds with trembling hands. "Oh, please lie still, darling! You will make your wounds worse. I dared not summon a leech——"

"No," muttered the wounded youth. "Constantius' blue-bearded devils will be searching the quarters for wounded Khaurani; they'll hang every man who has wounds to show he fought against them. Oh, Taramis, how could you betray the people who worshipped you?" In his fierce agony he writhed, weeping in rage and shame, and the terrified girl caught him in her arms, straining his tossing head against her bosom, imploring him to be quiet.

"Better death than the black shame that has come upon Khauran this day," he groaned. "Did you see it, Ivga?"

"No, Valerius." Her soft, nimble fingers were again at work, gently cleansing and closing the gaping edges of his raw wounds. "I was awakened by the noise of fighting in the streets—I looked out a casement and saw the Shemites cutting down people; then presently I heard you calling me faintly from the alley door."

"I had reached the limits of my strength," he muttered. "I fell in the alley and could not rise. I knew they'd find me soon if I lay there—I killed three of the blue-bearded beasts, by Ishtar! They'll never swagger through

Khauran's streets, by the gods! The fiends are tearing their hearts in hell!"

The trembling girl crooned soothingly to him, as to a wounded child, and closed his panting lips with her own cool sweet mouth. But the fire that raged in his soul would not allow him to lie silent.

"I was not on the wall when the Shemites entered," he burst out. "I was asleep in the barracks, with the others not on duty. It was just before dawn when our captain entered, and his face was pale under his helmet. 'The Shemites are in the city,' he said. 'The queen came to the southern gate and gave orders that they should be admitted. She made the men come down from the walls, where they've been on guard since Constantius entered the kingdom. I don't understand it, and neither does anyone else, but I heard her give the order, and we obeyed as we always do. We are ordered to assemble in the square before the palace. Form ranks outside the barracks and march—leave your arms and armor here. Ishtar knows what this means, but it is the queen's order.'

"Well, when we came to the square the Shemites were drawn up on foot opposite the palace, ten thousand of the blue-bearded devils, fully armed, and people's heads were thrust out of every window and door on the square. The streets leading into the square were thronged by bewildered folk. Taramis was standing on the steps of the palace, alone except for Constantius, who stood stroking his mustache like a great lean cat who has just devoured a sparrow. But fifty Shemites with bows in their hands were ranged below them.

"That's where the queen's guard should have been, but they were drawn up at the foot of the palace stair, as puzzled as we, though they had come fully armed, in spite of the queen's order.

"Taramis spoke to us then, and told us that she had reconsidered the proposal made her by Constantius—why, only yesterday she threw it in his teeth in open court!—and that she had decided to make him her royal consort. She did not explain why she had brought the Shemites into the city so treacherously. But she said that, as Constantius had control of a body of professional fighting men, the army of Khauran would no longer be needed, and therefore she disbanded it, and ordered us to go quietly to our homes.

"Why, obedience to our queen is second nature to us, but we were struck dumb and found no word to answer. We broke ranks almost before we knew what we were doing, like men in a daze.

"But when the palace guard was ordered to disarm likewise and disband, the captain of the guard, Conan, interrupted. Men said he was off duty the night before, and drunk. But he was wide awake now. He shouted to the guardsmen to stand as they were until they received an order from him—and such is his dominance of his men, that they obeyed in spite of the queen. He strode up to the palace steps and glared at Taramis—and then he roared: 'This is not the queen! This isn't Taramis! It's some devil in masquerade!'

"Then hell was to pay! I don't know just what happened. I think a Shemite struck Conan, and Conan killed him. The next instant the square was a battleground. The Shemites fell on the guardsmen, and their spears and arrows struck down many soldiers who had already disbanded.

"Some of us grabbed up such weapons as we could and fought back. We hardly knew what we were fighting for, but it was against Constantius and his devils—not against Taramis, I swear it! Constantius shouted to cut the traitors down. We were not traitors!" Despair and bewilderment shook his voice. The girl murmured pityingly, not understanding it all, but aching in sympathy with her lover's suffering.

"The people did not know which side to take. It was a madhouse of confusion and bewilderment. We who fought didn't have a chance, in no formation, without armor and only half armed. The guards were fully armed and drawn up in a square, but there were only five hundred of them. They took a heavy toll before they were cut down, but there could be only one conclusion to such a battle. And while her people were being slaughtered before her, Taramis stood on the palace steps, with Constantius' arm about her waist, and laughed like a heartless, beautiful fiend! Gods, it's all mad—mad!

"I never saw a man fight as Conan fought. He put his back to the courtyard wall, and before they overpowered him the dead men were strewn in heaps thigh-deep about him. But at last they dragged him down, a hundred against one. When I saw him fall I dragged myself away feeling as if the world had burst under my very fingers. I heard Constantius call to his dogs to take the captain alive—stroking his mustache, with that hateful smile on his lips!"

That smile was on the lips of Constantius at that very moment. He sat his horse among a cluster of his men—thick-bodied Shemites with curled blue-black beards and hooked noses; the low-swinging sun struck glints from their peaked helmets and the silvered scales of their corselets. Nearly a mile behind, the walls and towers of Khauran rose sheer out of the meadowlands.

By the side of the caravan road a heavy cross had been planted, and on this grim tree a man hung, nailed there by iron spikes through his hands and feet. Naked but for a loin-cloth, the man was almost a giant in stature, and his muscles stood out in thick corded ridges on limbs and body, which the sun had long ago burned brown. The perspiration of agony beaded his face and his mighty breast, but from under the tangled black mane that fell over his low, broad forehead, his blue eyes blazed with an unquenched fire. Blood oozed sluggishly from the lacerations in his hands and feet.

Constantius saluted him mockingly.

"I am sorry, captain," he said, "that I can not remain to ease your last hours, but I have duties to perform in yonder city. I must not keep our delicious queen waiting!" He laughed softly. "So I leave you to your own devices—and those beauties!" He pointed meaningly at the black shadows which swept incessantly back and forth, high above.

"Were it not for them, I imagine that a powerful brute like yourself should live on the cross for days. Do not cherish any illusions of rescue because I am leaving you unguarded. I have had it proclaimed that anyone seeking to take your body, living or dead, from the cross, will be flayed alive together with all the members of his family, in the public square. I am so firmly established in Khauran that my order is as good as a regiment of guardsmen. I am leaving no guard, because the vultures will not approach as long as anyone is near, and I do not wish them to feel any constraint. That is also why I brought you so far from the city. These desert vultures approach the walls no closer than this spot.

"And so, brave captain, farewell! I will remember you when, in an hour, Taramis lies in my arms."

Blood started afresh from the pierced palms as the victim's mallet-like fists clenched convulsively on the spike-heads. Knots and bunches of muscle started out on the massive arms, and Conan bent his head forward and spat savagely at Constantius' face. The *voivode* laughed coolly, wiped the saliva from his gorget and reined his horse about.

"Remember me when the vultures are tearing at your living flesh," he called mockingly. "The desert scavengers are a particularly voracious breed. I have seen men hang for hours on a cross, eyeless, earless, and scalpless, before the sharp beaks had eaten their way into their vitals."

Without a backward glance he rode toward the city, a supple, erect figure, gleaming in his burnished armor, his stolid, bearded henchmen jogging beside him. A faint rising of dust from the worn trail marked their passing.

The man hanging on the cross was the one touch of sentient life in a landscape that seemed desolate and deserted in the late evening. Khauran, less than a mile away, might have been on the other side of the world, and existing in another age.

Shaking the sweat out of his eyes, Conan stared blankly at the familiar terrain. On either side of the city, and beyond it, stretched the fertile meadowlands, with cattle browsing in the distance where fields and vineyards checkered the plain. The western and northern horizons were dotted with villages, miniature in the distance. A lesser distance to the southeast a silvery gleam marked the course of a river, and beyond that river sandy desert began abruptly to stretch away and away beyond the horizon. Conan stared at that expanse of empty waste shimmering tawnily in the late sunlight as a trapped hawk stares at the open sky. A revulsion shook him when he glanced at the gleaming towers of Khauran. The city had betrayed him—trapped him into circumstances that left him hanging to a wooden cross like a hare nailed to a tree.

A red lust for vengeance swept away the thought. Curses ebbed fitfully from the man's lips. All his universe contracted, focused, became incorporated in the four iron spikes that held him from life and freedom. His great muscles quivered, knotting like iron cables. With the sweat starting out on his grayish skin, he sought to gain leverage, to tear the nails from the wood. It was useless. They had been driven deep. Then he tried to tear his hands off the spikes, and it was not the knifing, abysmal agony that finally caused him to cease his efforts, but the futility of it. The spikes had driven broad and heavy, he could not drag them through the wounds. A surge of helplessness shook the giant, for the first time in his life. He hung motionless, his head resting on his breast, shutting his eyes against the aching glare of the sun.

A beat of wings caused him to look up, just as a feathered shadow shot down out of the sky. A keen beak, stabbing at his eyes, cut his cheek, and he jerked his head aside, shutting his eyes involuntarily. He shouted, a croaking, desperate shout of menace, and the vultures swerved away and retreated, frightened by the sound. They resumed their wary circling above his head. Blood trickled over Conan's mouth, and he licked his lips involuntarily, spat at the salty taste.

Thirst assailed him savagely. He had drunk deeply of wine the night before, and no water had touched his lips since before the battle in the square, that dawn. And killing was thirsty, salt-sweaty work. He glared at the distant river as a man in hell glares through the opened grille. He thought of gushing freshets of white water he had breasted, laved to the shoulders in liquid jade. He remembered great horns of foaming ale, jacks of sparkling wine gulped carelessly or spilled on the tavern floor. He bit his lip to keep from bellowing in intolerable anguish as a tortured animal bellows.

The sun sank, a lurid ball in a fiery sea of blood. Against a crimson rampart that banded the horizon the towers of the city floated unreal as a dream. The very sky was tinged with blood to his misted glare. He licked his blackened lips and stared with bloodshot eyes at the distant river. It too seemed crimson like blood, and the shadows crawling up from the east seemed black as ebony.

In his dulled ears sounded the louder beat of wings. Lifting his head he watched with the burning glare of a wolf the shadows wheeling above him. He knew that his shouts would frighten them away no longer. One dipped—dipped—lower and lower. Conan drew his head back as far as he could, waiting with terrible patience. The vulture swept in with a swift roar of wings. Its beak flashed down, ripping the skin on Conan's chin as he jerked his head aside; then before the bird could flash away, Conan's head lunged forward on his mighty neck muscles, and his teeth, snapping like those of a wolf, locked on the bare, wattled neck.

Instantly the vulture exploded into squawking, flapping hysteria. Its thrashing wings blinded the man, and its talons ripped his chest. But grimly he hung on, the muscles starting out in lumps on his jaws. And the scavenger's neck-bones crunched between those powerful teeth. With a spasmodic flutter the bird hung limp. Conan let go, spat blood from his mouth. The other vultures, terrified by the fate of their companion, were in full flight to a distant tree, where they perched like black demons in conclave.

Ferocious triumph surged through Conan's numbed brain. Life beat strongly and savagely through his veins. He could still deal death, he still lived. Every twinge of sensation, even of agony, was a negation of death.

"By Mitra!" Either a voice spoke, or he suffered from hallucination. "In all my life I have never seen such a thing!"

Shaking the sweat and blood from his eyes, Conan saw four horsemen sitting their steeds in the twilight and staring up at him. Three were lean, white robed hawks, Zuagir tribesmen without a doubt, nomads from beyond the river. The other was dressed like them in a white, girdled *khalat* and a flowing head dress which, banded about the temples with a triple circlet of braided camel-hair, fell to his shoulders. But he was not a Shemite. The dusk was not so thick, nor Conan's hawk-like sight so clouded that he could not perceive the man's facial characteristics.

He was as tall as Conan, though not so heavy-limbed. His shoulders were broad and his supple figure was hard as steel and whalebone. A short black beard did not altogether mask the aggressive jut of his lean jaw, and gray eyes cold and piercing as a sword gleamed from the shadow of the *kafieh*. Quieting his restless steed with a quick, sure hand, this man spoke: "By Mitra, I should know this man!"

"Aye!" It was the guttural accents of a Zuagir. "It is the Cimmerian who was captain of the queen's guard!"

"She must be casting off all her old favorites," muttered the rider. "Who'd have ever thought it of Queen Taramis? I'd rather have had a long, bloody war. It would have given us desert folk a chance to plunder. As it is we've come this close to the walls and found only this nag"—he glanced at a fine gelding led by one of the nomads—"and this dying dog."

Conan lifted his bloody head.

"If I could come down from this beam I'd make a dying dog out of you, you Zaporoskan thief!" he rasped through blackened lips.

"Mitra, the knave knows me!" exclaimed the other. "How, knave, do you know me?"

"There's only one of your breed in these parts," muttered Conan. "You are Olgerd Vladislav, the outlaw chief."

"Aye! And once a hetman of the *kozaki* of the Zaporoskan River, as you have guessed. Would you like to live?"

"Only a fool would ask that question," panted Conan.

"I am a hard man," said Olgerd, "and toughness is the only quality I respect in a man. I shall judge if you are a man, or only a dog after all, fit only to lie here and die."

"If we cut him down we may be seen from the walls," objected one of the nomads.

Olgerd shook his head.

"The dusk is too deep. Here, take this ax, Djebal, and cut down the cross at the base."

"If it falls forward it will crush him," objected Djebal. "I can cut it so it will fall backward, but then the shock of the fall may crack his skull and tear loose all his entrails."

"If he's worthy to ride with me he'll survive it," answered Olgerd imperturbably. "If not, then he doesn't deserve to live. Cut!"

The first impact of the battle-ax against the wood and its accompanying vibrations sent lances of agony through Conan's swollen feet and hands. Again and again the blade fell, and each stroke reverberated on his bruised brain, setting his tortured nerves aquiver. But he set his teeth and made no sound. The ax cut through, the cross reeled on its splintered base and toppled backward. Conan made his whole body a solid knot of iron-hard muscle, jammed his head back hard against the wood and held it rigid there. The beam struck the ground heavily and rebounded slightly. The impact tore his wounds and dazed him for an instant. He fought the rushing tide of blackness, sick and dizzy, but realized that the iron muscles that sheathed his vitals had saved him from permanent injury.

And he had made no sound, though blood oozed from his nostrils, and his belly muscles quivered with nausea. With a grunt of approval Djebal bent over him with a pair of pincers used to draw horse-shoe nails, and gripped the head of the spike in Conan's right hand, tearing the skin to get a grip on the deeply embedded head. The pincers were small for that work. Djebal sweated and tugged, swearing and wrestling with the stubborn iron, working it back and forth—in swollen flesh as well as in wood. Blood started, oozing over the Cimmerian's fingers. He lay so still he might have been dead, except for the spasmodic rise and fall of his great chest. The spike gave way, and Djebal held up the blood-stained thing with a grunt of satisfaction, then flung it away and bent over the other.

The process was repeated, and then Djebal turned his attention to Conan's skewered feet. But the Cimmerian, struggling up to a sitting posture, wrenched the pincers from his fingers and sent him staggering backward with a violent shove. Conan's hands were swollen to almost twice their normal size. His fingers felt like misshapen thumbs, and closing his hands was an agony that brought blood streaming from under his grinding teeth. But somehow, clutching the pincers clumsily with both hands, he managed to wrench out first one spike and then the other. They were not driven so deeply into the wood as the others had been.

He rose stiffly and stood upright on his swollen, lacerated feet, swaying drunkenly, the icy sweat dripping from his face and body. Cramps assailed him and he clamped his jaws against the desire to retch.

Olgerd, watching him impersonally, motioned him toward the stolen horse. Conan stumbled toward it, and every step was a stabbing, throbbing hell that flecked his lips with bloody foam. One misshapen, groping hand fell clumsily on the saddle-bow, a bloody foot somehow found the stirrup. Setting his teeth, he swung up, and he almost fainted in midair; but he came down in the saddle—and as he did so, Olgerd struck the horse sharply with his whip. The startled beast reared, and the man in the saddle swayed and slumped like a sack of sand, almost unseated. Conan had wrapped a rein about each hand, holding it in place with a clamping thumb. Drunkenly he exerted the strength of his knotted biceps, wrenching the horse down; it screamed, its jaw almost dislocated.

One of the riders lifted a water-flask questioningly.

Olgerd shook his head.

"Let him wait until we get to camp. It's only ten miles. If he's fit to live in the desert he'll live that long without a drink."

The group rode like swift ghosts toward the river, among them Conan swayed like a drunken man in the saddle, bloodshot eyes glazed, foam drying on his blackened lips.

3. *A Letter to Nemedia*

The savant Astreas, traveling in the East in his never-tiring search for knowledge, wrote a letter to his friend and fellow-philosopher Alcemides, in his native Nemedia, which constitutes the entire knowledge of the Western nations concerning the events of that period in the East, always a hazy, half-mythical region in the minds of the Western folk.

Astreas wrote, in part: "You can scarcely conceive, my dear old friend, of the conditions now existing in this tiny kingdom since Queen Taramis admitted Constantius and his mercenaries, an event which I briefly described in my last, hurried letter. Seven months have passed since then, during which time it seems as though the devil himself had been loosed in this unfortunate realm. Taramis seems to have gone quite mad; whereas formerly she was famed for her virtue, justice and tranquillity, she is now notorious for qualities precisely opposite to these just enumerated. Her private life is a scandal—or perhaps 'private' is not the correct term, since the queen makes no attempt to conceal the debauchery of her court. She constantly indulges in the most infamous revelries, in which the unfortunate ladies of the court are forced to join, young married women as well as virgins.

"She herself has not bothered to marry her paramour, Constantius, who sits on the throne beside her and reigns as her royal consort, and his officers follow his example, and do not hesitate to debauch any woman they desire, regardless of her rank or station. The wretched kingdom groans under exorbitant taxation, the farms are stripped to the bone, and the merchants go in rags which are all that is left them by the tax gatherers. Nay, they are lucky if they escape with a whole skin.

"I sense your incredulity, good Alcemides, you will fear that I exaggerate conditions in Khauran. Such conditions would be unthinkable in any of the Western countries, admittedly. But you must realize the vast difference that exists between West and East, especially this part of the East. In the first place, Khauran is a kingdom of no great size, one of the many principalities which at one time formed the eastern part of the empire of Koth, and which later regained the independence which was theirs at a still earlier age. This part of the world is made up of these tiny realms, diminutive in comparison with the great kingdoms of the West, or the great sultanates of the farther

East, but important in their control of the caravan routes, and in the wealth concentrated in them.

"Khauran is the most southeasterly of these principalities, bordering on the very deserts of eastern Shem. The city of Khauran is the only city of any magnitude in the realm, and stands within sight of the river which separates the grasslands from the sandy desert, like a watch tower to guard the fertile meadows behind it. The land is so rich that it yields three and four crops a year, and the plains north and west of the city are dotted with villages. To one accustomed to the great plantations and stock farms of the West, it is strange to see these tiny fields and vineyards; yet wealth in grain and fruit pours from them as from a horn of plenty. The villagers are agriculturists, nothing else. Of a mixed, aboriginal race, they are unwarlike, unable to protect themselves, and forbidden the possession of arms. Dependent wholly upon the soldiers of the city for protection, they are helpless under the present conditions. So the savage revolt of the rural sections, which would be a certainty in any Western nation, is here impossible.

"They toil supinely under the iron hand of Constantius, and his black-bearded Shemites ride incessantly through the fields, with whips in their hands, like the slave-drivers of the black serfs who toil in the plantations of southern Zingara.

"Nor do the people of the city fare any better. Their wealth is stripped from them, their fairest daughters taken to glut the insatiable lust of Constantius and his mercenaries. These men are utterly without mercy or compassion, possessed of all the characteristics our armies learned to abhor in our wars against the Shemitish allies of Argos—inhuman cruelty, lust, and wild-beast ferocity. The people of the city are Khauran's ruling caste, predominantly Hyborian, and valorous and war-like. But the treachery of their queen delivered them into the hands of their oppressors. The Shemites are the only armed force in Khauran, and the most hellish punishment is inflicted on any Khauran found possessing weapons. A systematic persecution to destroy the young Khaurani men able to bear arms has been savagely pursued. Many have ruthlessly been slaughtered, others sold as slaves to the Turanians. Thousands have fled the kingdom and either entered the service of other rulers, or become outlaws, lurking in numerous bands along the borders.

"At present there is some possibility of invasion from the desert, which is inhabited by tribes of Shemitish nomads. The mercenaries of Constantius are men from the Shemitish cities of the west, Pelishtim, Anakim, Akkharim, and are ardently hated by the Zuagirs and other wandering tribes. As you know, good Alcemides, the countries of these barbarians are divided into the western meadowlands which stretch to the distant ocean, and in which rise the cities of the town-dwellers, and the eastern deserts, where the lean nomads hold sway; there is incessant warfare between the dwellers of the cities and the dwellers of the desert.

"The Zuagirs have fought with and raided Khauran for centuries, without success, but they resent its conquest by their western kin. It is rumored that their natural antagonism is being fomented by the man who was formerly the captain of the queen's guard, and who, somehow escaping the hate of Constantius, who actually had him on the cross, fled to the nomads. He is called Conan, and is himself a barbarian, one of those gloomy Cimmerians whose ferocity our soldiers have more than once learned to their bitter cost. It is rumored that he has become the right hand man of Olgerd Vladislav, the *kozak* adventurer who wandered down from the northern steppes and made himself chief of a band of Zuagirs. There are also rumors that this band has increased vastly in the last few months, and that Olgerd, incited no doubt by this Cimmerian, is even considering a raid on Khauran.

"It can not be anything more than a raid, as the Zuagirs are without siege-machines, or the knowledge of investing a city, and it has been proven repeatedly in the past that the nomads in their loose formation, or rather lack of formation, are no match in hand-to-hand fighting for the well-disciplined, fully armed warriors of the Shemitish cities. The natives of Khauran would perhaps welcome this conquest, since the nomads could deal with them no more harshly than their present masters, and even total extermination would be preferable to the suffering they have to endure. But they are so cowed and helpless that they could give no aid to the invaders.

"Their plight is most wretched. Taramis, apparently possessed of a demon, stops at nothing. She has abolished the worship of Ishtar, and turned the temple into a shrine of idolatry. She has destroyed the ivory image of the goddess which these eastern Hyborians worship (and which, inferior as it is to the true religion of Mitra which we Western nations recognize, is still superior to the devil-worship of the Shemites) and filled the temple of Ishtar with obscene images of every imaginable sort—gods and goddesses of the night, portrayed in all the salacious and perverse poses and with all the revolting characteristics that a degenerate brain could conceive. Many of these images are to be identified as foul deities of the Shemites, the Turanians, the Vendhyans, and the Khitans, but others are reminiscent of a hideous and half-remembered antiquity, vile shapes forgotten except in the most obscure legends. Where the queen gained the knowledge of them I dare not even hazard a guess.

She has instituted human sacrifice, and since her mating with Constantius, no less than five hundred men, women and children have been immolated. Some of these have died on the altar she has set up in the temple, herself wielding the sacrificial dagger, but most have met a more horrible doom.

"Taramis has placed some sort of monster in a crypt in the temple. What it is, and whence it came, none knows. But shortly after she had crushed the desperate revolt of her soldiers against Constantius, she spent a night alone in the desecrated temple, alone except for a dozen bound captives, and the shuddering people saw thick, foul-smelling smoke curling up from the dome, heard all night the frenetic chanting of the queen, and the agonized cries of her tortured captives, and toward dawn another voice mingled with these sounds—a strident, inhuman croaking that froze the blood of all who heard.

"In the full dawn Taramis reeled drunkenly from the temple, her eyes blazing with demoniac triumph. The captives were never seen again, nor the croaking voice heard. But there is a room in the temple into which none ever goes but the queen, driving a human sacrifice before her. And this victim is never seen again. All know that in that grim chamber lurks some monster from the black night of ages, which devours the shrieking humans Taramis delivers up to it.

"I can no longer think of her as a mortal woman, but as a rabid she-fiend, crouching in her blood-fouled lair amongst the bones and fragments of her victims, with taloned, crimsoned fingers. That the gods allow her to pursue her awful course unchecked almost shakes my faith in divine justice.

"When I compare her present conduct with her deportment when first I came to Khauran, seven months ago, I am confused with bewilderment, and almost inclined to the belief held by many of the people—that a demon has possessed the body of Taramis. A young soldier, Valerius, had another belief. He believed that a witch had assumed a form identical with that of Khauran's adored ruler. He believed that Taramis had been spirited away in the night, and confined in some dungeon, and that this being ruling in her place was but a female sorcerer. He swore that he would find the real queen, if she still lived, but I greatly fear that he himself has fallen victim to the cruelty of Constantius. He was implicated in the revolt of the palace guards, escaped and remained in hiding for some time, stubbornly refusing to seek safety abroad, and it was during this time that I encountered him and he told me his beliefs.

"But he has disappeared, as so many have, whose fate one dares not conjecture, and I fear he has been apprehended by the spies of Constantius.

"But I must conclude this letter and slip it out of the city by means of a swift carrier-pigeon, which will carry it to the post whence I purchased it, on the borders of Koth. By rider and camel train it will eventually come to you. I must haste, before dawn. It is late, and the stars gleam whitely on the gardened roofs of Khauran. A shuddering silence envelops the city, in which I hear the throb of a sullen drum from the distant temple. I doubt not that Taramis is there, concocting more deviltry."

But the savant was incorrect in his conjecture concerning the whereabouts of the woman he called Taramis. The girl whom the world knew as queen of Khauran stood in a dungeon, lighted only by a flickering torch which played on her features, etching the diabolical cruelty of her beautiful countenance.

On the bare stone floor before her crouched a figure whose nakedness was scarcely covered with tattered rags. This figure Salome touched contemptuously with the upturned toe of her gilded sandal, and smiled vindictively as her victim shrank away.

"You do not love my caresses, sweet sister?"

Taramis was still beautiful, in spite of her rags and the imprisonment and abuse of seven weary months. She did not reply to her sister's taunts, but bent her head as one grown accustomed to mockery.

This resignation did not please Salome. She bit her red lip, and stood tapping the toe of her shoe against the flags as she frowned down at the passive figure. Salome was clad in the barbaric splendor of a woman of Shushan. Jewels glittered in the torchlight on her gilded sandals, on her gold breast-plates and the slender chains that held them in place. Gold anklets clashed as she moved, jeweled bracelets weighted her bare arms. Her tall coiffure was that of a Shemitish woman, and jade pendants hung from gold hoops in her ears, flashing and sparkling with each impatient movement of her haughty head. A gem-crusted girdle supported a silk skirt so transparent that it was in the nature of a cynical mockery of convention.

Suspended from her shoulders and trailing down her back hung a darkly scarlet cloak, and this was thrown carelessly over the crook of one arm and the bundle that arm supported.

Salome stooped suddenly and with her free hand grasped her sister's disheveled hair and forced back the girl's head to stare into her eyes. Taramis met that tigerish glare without flinching.

"You are not so ready with your tears as formerly, sweet sister," muttered the witch-girl.

"You shall wring no more tears from me," answered Taramis. "Too often you have reveled in the spectacle of the queen of Khauran sobbing for mercy on her knees. I know that you have spared me only to torment me; that is why you have limited your tortures to such torments as neither slay nor permanently disfigure. But I fear you no longer; you have strained out the last vestige of hope, fright and shame from me. Slay me and be done with it, for I have shed my last tear for your enjoyment, you she-devil from hell!"

"You flatter yourself, my dear sister," purred Salome. "So far it is only your handsome body that I have caused to suffer, only your pride and self-esteem that I have crushed. You forget that, unlike myself, you are capable of mental torment. I have observed this when I have regaled you with narratives concerning the comedies I have enacted with some of your stupid subjects. But this time I have brought more vivid proof of these farces. Did you know that Krallides, your faithful councillor, had come skulking back from Turan and been captured?"

Taramis turned pale.

"What—what have you done to him?"

For answer Salome drew the mysterious bundle from under her cloak, shook off the silken swathings, and held it up—the head of a young man, the features frozen in a convulsion as if death had come in the midst of inhuman agony.

Taramis cried out as if a blade had pierced her heart.

"Oh, Ishtar! Krallides!"

"Aye! He was seeking to stir up the people against me, poor fool, telling them that Conan spoke the truth when he said I was not Taramis. How would the people rise against the Falcon's Shemites? With sticks and pebbles? Bah! Dogs are eating his headless body in the market-place, and this foul carrion shall be cast into the sewer to rot.

"How, sister!" She paused, smiling down at her victim. "Have you discovered that you still have unshed tears? Good! I reserved the mental torment for the last. Hereafter I shall show you many such sights as—this!"

Standing there in the torchlight with the severed head in her hand she did not look like anything ever born by a human woman, in spite of her awful beauty. Taramis did not look up. She lay face down on the slimy floor, her slim body shaken in sobs of agony, beating her clenched hands against the stones. Salome sauntered toward the door, her anklets clashing at each step, her ear pendants winking in the torch glare.

A few moments later she emerged from a door under a sullen arch that let into a court which in turn opened upon a winding alley. A man standing there turned toward her—a giant Shemite, with somber eyes and shoulders like a bull, his great black beard falling over his mighty, silver-mailed breast.

"She wept?" His rumble was like that of a bull, deep, low-pitched and stormy. He was the general of the mercenaries, one of the few even of Constantius' associates who knew the secret of the queens of Khauran.

"Aye, Khumbanigash. There are whole sections of her sensibilities that I have not touched. When one sense is dulled by continual laceration, I will discover a newer, more poignant pang.—Here, dog!" A trembling, shambling figure in rags, filth and matted hair approached, one of the beggars that slept in the alleys and open courts. Salome tossed the head to him. "Here, deaf one; cast that in the nearest sewer.—Make the sign with your hands, Khumbanigash. He can not hear."

The general complied, and the tousled head bobbed, as the man turned painfully away.

"Why do you keep up this farce?" rumbled Khumbanigash. "You are so firmly established on the throne that nothing can unseat you. What if the Khaurani fools learn the truth? They can do nothing. Proclaim yourself in your true identity! Show them their beloved ex-queen—and cut off her head in the public square!"

"Not yet, good Khumbanigash——"

The arched door slammed on the hard accents of Salome, the stormy reverberations of Khumbanigash. The mute beggar crouched in the courtyard, and there was none to see that the hands which held the severed head were quivering strongly—brown, sinewy hands, strangely incongruous with the bent body and filthy tatters.

"I knew it!" It was a fierce, vibrant whisper, scarcely audible. "She lives! Oh, Krallides, your martyrdom was not in vain! They have her locked in that dungeon. Oh, Ishtar, if you love true men, aid me now!"

4. *Wolves of the Desert*

Olgerd Vladislav filled his jeweled goblet with crimson wine from a golden jug and thrust the vessel across the ebony table to Conan the Cimmerian. Olgerd's apparel would have satisfied the vanity of any Zaporoskan hetman.

His *khalat* was of white silk, with pearls sewn on the bosom. Girdled at the waist with a Bakhauriot belt, its skirts were drawn back to reveal his wide silken breeches, tucked into short boots of soft green leather, adorned with gold thread. On his head was a green silk turban, wound about a spired helmet chased with gold. His only weapon was a broad curved Cherkees knife in an ivory sheath girdled high on his left hip, *kozak* fashion. Throwing himself back in his gilded chair with its carven eagles, Olgerd spread his booted legs before him, and gulped down the sparkling wine noisily.

To his splendor the huge Cimmerian opposite him offered a strong contrast, with his square-cut black mane, brown scarred countenance and burning blue eyes. He was clad in black mesh-mail, and the only glitter about him was the broad gold buckle of the belt which supported his sword in its worn leather scabbard.

They were alone in the silk-walled tent, which was hung with gilt-worked tapestries and littered with rich carpets and velvet cushions, the loot of the caravans. From outside came a low, incessant murmur, the sound that always accompanies a great throng of men, in camp or otherwise. An occasional gust of desert wind rattled the palm-leaves.

"Today in the shadow, tomorrow in the sun," quoth Olgerd, loosening his crimson girdle a trifle and reaching again for the wine-jug. "That's the way of life. Once I was a hetman on the Zaporoska; now I'm a desert chief. Seven months ago you were hanging on a cross outside Khauran. Now you're lieutenant to the most powerful raider between Turan and the western meadows. You should be thankful to me!"

"For recognizing my usefulness?" Conan laughed and lifted the jug. "When you allow the elevation of a man, one can be sure that you'll profit by his advancement. I've earned everything I've won, with my blood and sweat." He glanced at the scars on the insides of his palms. There were scars, too, on his body, scars that had not been there seven months ago.

"You fight like a regiment of devils," conceded Olgerd. "But don't get to thinking that you've had anything to do with the recruits who've swarmed in to join us. It was our success at raiding, guided by my wit, that brought them in. These nomads are always looking for a successful leader to follow, and they have more faith in a foreigner than in one of their own race.

"There's no limit to what we may accomplish! We have eleven thousand men now. In another year we may have three times that number. We've contented ourselves, so far, with raids on the Turanian outposts and the city-states to the west. With thirty or forty thousand men we'll raid no longer; we'll invade and conquer and establish ourselves as rulers. I'll be emperor of all Shem yet, and you'll be my vizier, so long as you carry out my orders unquestioningly. In the meantime, I think we'll ride eastward and storm that Turanian outpost at Vezek, where the caravans pay toll."

Conan shook his head. "I think not."

Olgerd glared, his quick temper irritated.

"What do you mean, *you* think not? *I* do the thinking for this army!"

"There are enough men in this band now for my purpose," answered the Cimmerian. "I'm sick of waiting. I have a score to settle."

"Oh!" Olgerd scowled, and gulped wine, then grinned. "Still thinking of that cross, eh? Well, I like a good hater. But that can wait."

"You told me once you'd aid me in taking Khauran," said Conan.

"Yes, but that was before I began to see the full possibilities of our power," answered Olgerd. "I was only thinking of the loot in the city. I don't want to waste our strength unprofitably. Khauran is too strong a nut for us to crack now. Maybe in a year——"

"Within the week," answered Conan, and the *kozak* stared at the certainty in his voice.

"Listen," said Olgerd, "even if I were willing to throw away men on such a hare-brained attempt—what could you expect? Do you think these wolves could besiege and take a city like Khauran?"

"There'll be no siege," answered the Cimmerian. "I know how to draw Constantius out into the plain."

"And what then?" cried Olgerd with an oath. "In the arrow-play our horsemen would have the worst of it, for the armor of the *asshuri* is the better, and when it came to sword-strokes their close-marshaled ranks of trained swordsmen would cleave through our loose lines and scatter our men like chaff before the wind."

"Not if there were three thousand desperate Hyborian horsemen fighting in a solid wedge such as I could teach them," answered Conan.

"And where would you secure three thousand Hyborians?" asked Olgerd with vast sarcasm. "Will you conjure them out of the air?"

"I *have* them," answered the Cimmerian imperturbably. "Three thousand men of Khauran camp at the oasis of Akrel awaiting my orders."

"*What?*" Olgerd glared like a startled wolf.

"Aye. Men who had fled from the tyranny of Constantius. Most of them have been living the lives of outlaws in the deserts east of Khauran, and are gaunt and hard and desperate as man-eating tigers. One of them will be a match for any three squat mercenaries. It takes oppression and hardship to stiffen men's guts and put the fire of hell into their thews. They were broken up into small bands; all they needed was a leader. They believed the word I sent them by my riders, and assembled at the oasis and put themselves at my disposal."

"All this without my knowledge?" A feral light began to gleam in Olgerd's eyes. He hitched at his weapon-girdle.

"It was *I* they wished to follow, not *you*."

"And what did you tell these outcasts to gain their allegiance?" There was a dangerous ring in Olgerd's voice.

"I told them that I'd use this horde of desert wolves to help them destroy Constantius and give Khauran back into the hands of its citizens."

"You fool!" whispered Olgerd. "Do you deem yourself chief already?"

The men were on their feet, facing each other across the ebony board, devil-lights dancing in Olgerd's cold gray eyes, a grim smile on the Cimmerian's hard lips.

"I'll have you torn between four palm-trees," said the *kozak* calmly.

"Call the men and bid them do it!" challenged Conan. "See if they obey you!"

Baring his teeth in a snarl, Olgerd lifted his hand—then paused. There was something about the confidence in the Cimmerian's dark face that shook him. His eyes began to burn like those of a wolf.

"You scum of the western hills," he muttered, "have you dared seek to undermine my power?"

"I didn't have to," answered Conan. "You lied when you said I had nothing to do with bringing in the new recruits. I had everything to do with it. They took your orders, but they fought for me. There is not room for two chiefs of the Zuagirs. They know I am the stronger man. I understand them better than you, and they, me; because I am a barbarian too."

"And what will they say when you ask them to fight for the Khaurani?" asked Olgerd sardonically.

"They'll follow me. I'll promise them a camel-train of gold from the palace. Khauran will be willing to pay that as a guerdon for getting rid of Constantius. After that, I'll lead them against the Turanians as you have planned. They want loot, and they'd as soon fight Constantius for it as anybody."

In Olgerd's eyes grew a recognition of defeat. In his red dreams of empire he had missed what was going on about him. Happenings and events that had seemed meaningless before now flashed into his mind, with their true significance, bringing a realization that Conan spoke no idle boast. The giant black-mailed figure before him was the real chief of the Zuagirs.

"Not if you die!" muttered Olgerd, and his hand flickered toward his hilt. But quick as the stroke of a great cat Conan's arm shot across the table and his fingers locked on Olgerd's forearm. There was a snap of breaking bones, and for a tense instant the scene held: the men facing each other as motionless as images, perspiration starting out on Olgerd's forehead. Conan laughed, never easing his grip on the broken arm.

"Are you fit to live, Olgerd?"

His smile did not alter as the corded muscles rippled in knotting ridges along his forearm and his fingers ground into the *kozak's* quivering flesh. There was the sound of broken bones grating together and Olgerd's face turned the color of ashes; blood oozed from his lip where his teeth sank, but he uttered no sound.

With a laugh Conan released him and drew back, and the *kozak* swayed, caught the table edge with his good hand to steady himself.

"I give you life, Olgerd, as you gave it to me," said Conan tranquilly, "though it was for your own ends that you took me down from the cross. It was a bitter test you gave me then, you couldn't have endured it, neither could anyone, but a western barbarian.

"Take your horse and go. It's tied behind the tent, and food and water are in the saddle bags. None will see your going, but go quickly. There's no room for a fallen chief on the desert. If the warriors see you, maimed and deposed, they'll never let you leave the camp alive."

Olgerd did not reply. Slowly, without a word, he turned and stalked across the tent, through the flapped opening. Unspeaking he climbed into the saddle of the great white stallion that stood tethered there in the shade of a spreading palm-tree; and unspeaking, with his broken arm thrust in the bosom of his *khalat*, he reined the steed about and rode eastward into the open desert, out of the life of the people of the Zuagir.

Inside the tent Conan emptied the wine-jug and smacked his lips with relish. Tossing the empty vessel into a corner, he braced his belt and strode out through the front opening, halting for a moment to let his gaze sweep over the lines of camel-hair tents that stretched before him, and the white-robed figures that moved among them, arguing, singing, mending bridles or whetting tulwars.

He lifted his voice in a thunder that carried to the farthest confines of the encampment: "*Aie*, you dogs, sharpen your ears and listen! Gather around here. I have a tale to tell you."

5. The Voice from the Crystal

In a chamber in a tower near the city wall a group of men listened attentively to the words of one of their number. They were young men, but hard and sinewy, with the bearing that comes only to men rendered desperate by adversity. They were clad in mail shirts and worn leather; swords hung at their girdles.

"I knew that Conan spoke the truth when he said it was not Taramis!" the speaker exclaimed. "For months I have haunted the outskirts of the palace, playing the part of a deaf beggar. At last I learned what I had believed—that our queen was a prisoner in the dungeons that adjoin the palace. I watched my opportunity and captured a Shemitish jailer—knocked him senseless as he left the courtyard late one night—dragged him into a cellar near by and questioned him. Before he died he told me what I have just told you, and what we have suspected all along—that the woman ruling Khauran is a witch: Salome. Taramis, he said, is imprisoned in the lowest dungeon.

"This invasion of the Zuagirs gives us the opportunity we sought. What

Conan means to do, I can not say. Perhaps he merely wishes vengeance on Constantius. Perhaps he intends sacking the city and destroying it. He is a barbarian and no one can understand their minds.

"But this is what we must do: rescue Taramis while the battle rages! Constantius will march out into the plain to give battle. Even now his men are mounting. He will do this because there is not sufficient food in the city to stand a siege. Conan burst out of the desert so suddenly that there was no time to bring in supplies. And the Cimmerian is equipped for a siege. Scouts have reported that the Zuagirs have siege engines, built undoubtedly, according to the instructions of Conan, who learned all the arts of war among the Western nations.

"Constantius does not desire a long siege; so he will march with his warriors into the plain, where he expects to scatter Conan's forces at one stroke. He will leave only a few hundred men in the city, and they will be on the walls and in the towers commanding the gates.

"The prison will be left all but unguarded. When we have freed Taramis our next actions will depend upon circumstances. If Conan wins, we must show Taramis to the people and bid them rise—they will! Oh, they will! With their bare hands they are enough to overpower the Shemites left in the city and close the gates against both the mercenaries and the nomads. Neither must get within the walls! Then we will parley with Conan. He was always loyal to Taramis. If he knows the truth, and she appeals to him, I believe he will spare the city. If, which is more probable, Constantius prevails, and Conan is routed, we must steal out of the city with the queen and seek safety in flight.

"Is all clear?"

They replied with one voice.

"Then let us loosen our blades in our scabbards, commend our souls to Ishtar, and start for the prison, for the mercenaries are already marching through the southern gate."

This was true. The dawnlight glinted on peaked helmets pouring in a steady stream through the broad arch, on the bright housings of the chargers. This would be a battle of horsemen, such as is possible only in the lands of the East. The riders flowed through the gates like a river of steel—somber figures in black and silver mail, with their curled beards and hooked noses, and their inexorable eyes in which glimmered the fatality of their race—the utter lack of doubt or of mercy.

The streets and the walls were lined with throngs of people who watched silently these warriors of an alien race riding forth to defend their native city. There was no sound. Dully, expressionless they watched, those gaunt people in shabby garments, their caps in their hands.

In a tower that overlooked the broad street that led to the southern gate, Salome lolled on a velvet couch cynically watching Constantius as he settled his broad sword belt about his lean hips and drew on his gauntlets. They were alone in the chamber. Outside, the rhythmical clank of harness and shuffle of horses' hoofs welled up through the gold-barred casements.

"Before nightfall," quoth Constantius, giving a twirl to his thin mustache, "you'll have some captives to feed to your temple-devil. Does it not grow weary of soft, city-bred flesh? Perhaps it would relish the harder thews of a desert man."

"Take care you do not fall prey to a fiercer beast than Thaug," warned the girl. "Do not forget who it is that leads these desert animals."

"I am not likely to forget," he answered. "That is one reason why I am advancing to meet him. The dog has fought in the West and knows the art of siege. My scouts had some trouble in approaching his columns, for his outriders have eyes like hawks, but they did get close enough to see the engines he is dragging on ox-cart wheels drawn by camels—catapults, rams, ballistas, mangonels—by Ishtar! he must have had ten thousand men working day and night for a month. Where he got the material for their construction is more than I can understand. Perhaps he has a treaty with the Turanians, and gets supplies from them.

"Anyway, they won't do him any good. I've fought these desert wolves before—an exchange of arrows for awhile, in which the armor of my warriors protects them—then a charge and my squadrons sweep through the loose swarms of the nomads, wheel and sweep back through, scattering them to the four winds. I'll ride back through the south gate before sunset, with hundreds of naked captives staggering at my horse's tail. We'll hold a fête tonight, in the great square. My soldiers delight in flaying their enemies alive—we will have a wholesale skinning, and make these weak-kneed townsfolk watch. As for Conan, it will afford me intense pleasure, if we take him alive, to impale him on the palace steps."

"Skin as many as you like," answered Salome indifferently. "I would like a dress made of human hide. But at least a hundred captives you must give to me—for the altar, and for Thaug."

"It shall be done," answered Constantius, with his gauntleted hand brushing back the thin hair from his high bald forehead, burned dark by the sun. "For victory and the fair honor of Taramis!" he said sardonically, and, taking his vizored helmet under his arm, he lifted a hand in salute, and strode clanking from the chamber. His voice drifted back, harshly lifted in orders to his officers.

Salome leaned back on the couch, yawned, stretched herself like a great supple cat, and called: "Zang!"

A cat-footed priest, with features like yellowed parchment stretched over a skull, entered noiselessly.

Salome turned to an ivory pedestal on which stood two crystal globes, and taking from it the smaller, she handed the glistening sphere to the priest.

"Ride with Constantius," she said. "Give me the news of the battle. Go!"

The skull-faced man bowed low, and hiding the globe under his dark mantle, hurried from the chamber.

Outside in the city there was no sound, except the clank of boots and after a while the clang of a closing gate. Salome mounted a wide marble stair that led to the flat, canopied, marble-battlemented roof. She was above all other buildings of the city. The streets were deserted, the great square in front of the palace was empty. In normal times folk shunned the grim temple which rose on the opposite side of that square, but now the town looked like a dead city. Only on the southern wall and the roofs that overlooked it was there any sign of life. There the people massed thickly. They made no demonstration, did not know whether to hope for the victory or defeat of Constantius. Victory meant further misery under his intolerable rule; defeat probably meant the sack of the city and red massacre. No word had come from Conan. They did not know what to expect at his hands. They remembered that he was a barbarian.

The squadrons of the mercenaries were moving out into the plain. In the distance, just this side of the river, other dark masses were moving, barely recognizable as men on horses. Objects dotted the farther bank, Conan had not brought his siege engines across the river, apparently fearing an attack in the midst of the crossing. But he had crossed with his full force of horsemen. The sun rose and struck glints of fire from the dark multitudes. The squadrons from the city broke into a gallop; a deep roar reached the ears of the people on the wall.

The rolling masses merged, intermingled; at that distance it was a tangled confusion in which no details stood out. Charge and countercharge were not to be identified. Clouds of dust rose from the plains, under the stamping hoofs, veiling the action. Through these swirling clouds masses of riders loomed, appearing and disappearing, and spears flashed.

Salome shrugged her shoulders and descended the stair. The palace lay silent. All the slaves were on the wall, gazing vainly southward with the citizens.

She entered the chamber where she had talked with Constantius, and approached the pedestal, noting that the crystal globe was clouded, shot with bloody streaks of crimson. She bent over the ball, swearing under her breath.

"Zang!" she called. "Zang!"

Mists swirled in the sphere, resolving themselves into billowing dust-clouds through which black figures rushed unrecognizably; steel glinted like lightning in the murk. Then the face of Zang leaped into startling distinctness; it was as if the wide eyes gazed up at Salome. Blood trickled from a gash in the skull-like head, the skin was gray with sweat-runneled dust. The lips parted, writhing; to other ears than Salome's it would have seemed that the face in the crystal contorted silently. But sound to her came as plainly from those ashen lips as if the priest had been in the same room with her, instead of miles away, shouting into the smaller crystal. Only the gods of darkness knew what unseen, magic filaments linked together those shimmering spheres.

"Salome!" shrieked the bloody head. "*Salome!*"

"Then!" she cried. "Speak! How goes the battle?"

"Doom is upon us!" screamed the skull-like apparition. "Khauran is lost! Aie, my horse is down and I can not win clear! Men are falling around me! They are dying like flies, in their silvered mail!"

"Stop yammering and tell me what happened!" she cried harshly.

"We rode at the desert dogs and they came on to meet us!" yowled the priest. "Arrows flew in clouds between the hosts, and the nomads wavered. Constantius ordered the charge. In even ranks we thundered upon them.

"Then the masses of their horde opened to right and left, and through the cleft rushed three thousand Hyborian horsemen whose presence we had not even suspected. Men of Khauran, mad with hate! Big men in full armor on massive horses! In a solid wedge of steel they smote us like a thunderbolt. They split our ranks asunder before we knew what was upon us, and then the desert men swarmed on us from either flank.

"They have ripped our ranks apart, broken and scattered us! It is a trick of that devil Conan! The siege engines are false—mere frames of palm trunks and painted silk, that fooled our scouts who saw them from afar. A trick to draw us out to our doom! Our warriors flee! Khumbanigash is down—Conan slew him. I do not see Constantius. The Khaurani rage through our milling masses like blood-mad lions, and the desert men feather us with arrows. I—ahhh!"

There was a flicker of lightning, or trenchant steel, a burst of bright blood—then abruptly the image vanished, like a bursting bubble, and Salome was staring into an empty crystal ball that mirrored only her own furious features.

She stood perfectly still for a few moments, erect and staring into space. Then she clapped her hands and another skull-like priest entered, as silent and immobile as the first.

"Constantius is beaten," she said swiftly. "We are doomed. Conan will be crashing at our gates within the hour. If he catches me, I have no illusions as to what I can expect. But first I am going to make sure that my cursed sister never ascends the throne again. Follow me! Come what may, we shall give Thaug a feast."

As she descended the stairs and galleries of the palace, she heard a faint rising echo from the distant walls. The people there had begun to realize that the battle was going against Constantius. Through the dust clouds masses of horsemen were visible, racing toward the city.

Palace and prison were connected by a long closed gallery, whose vaulted roof rose on gloomy arches. Hurrying along this, the false queen and her slave passed through a heavy door at the other end that let them into the dim-lit recesses of the prison. They had emerged into a wide, arched corridor at a point near where a stone stair descended into the darkness. Salome recoiled suddenly, swearing. In the gloom of the hall lay a motionless form—a Shemitish jailer, his short beard tilted toward the roof as his head hung on a half-severed neck. As panting voices from below reached the girl's ears, she shrank back into the black shadow of an arch, pushing the priest behind her, her hand groping in her girdle.

6. *The Vulture's Wings*

It was the smoky light of a torch which roused Taramis, queen of Khauran, from the slumber in which she sought forgetfulness. Lifting herself on her hand she raked back her tangled hair and blinked up, expecting to meet the mocking countenance of Salome, malign with new torments. Instead a cry of pity and horror reached her ears.

"Taramis! Oh, my queen!"

The sound was so strange to her ears that she thought she was still dreaming. Behind the torch she could make out figures now, the glint of steel, then five countenances bent toward her, not swarthy and hook-nosed, but lean, aquiline faces, browned by the sun. She crouched in her tatters, staring wildly.

One of the figures sprang forward and fell on one knee before her, arms stretched appealingly toward her.

"Oh, Taramis! Thank Ishtar we have found you! Do you not remember me, Valerius? Once with your own lips you praised me, after the battle of Korveka!"

"Valerius!" she stammered. Suddenly tears welled into her eyes. "Oh, I dream! It is some magic of Salome's, to torment me!"

"No!" The cry rang with exultation. "It is your own true vassals come to rescue you! Yet we must hasten. Constantius fights in the plain against Conan, who has brought the Zuagirs across the river, but three hundred Shemites yet hold the city. We slew the jailer and took his keys, and have seen no other guards. But we must be gone. Come!"

The queen's legs gave way, not from weakness but from the reaction. Valerius lifted her like a child, and with the torch-bearer hurrying before them, they left the dungeon and went up a slimy stone stair. It seemed to mount endlessly, but presently they emerged into a corridor.

They were passing a dark arch when the torch was suddenly struck out, and the bearer cried out in fierce, brief agony. A burst of blue fire glared in the dark corridor, in which the furious face of Salome was limned momentarily, with a beast like figure crouching beside her—then the eyes of the watchers were blinded by that blaze.

Valerius tried to stagger along the corridor with the queen; dazedly he heard the sound of murderous blows driven deep in flesh, accompanied by gasps of death and a bestial grunting. Then the queen was torn brutally from his arms, and a savage blow on his helmet dashed him to the floor.

Grimly he crawled to his feet, shaking his head in an effort to rid himself of the blue flame which seemed still to dance devilishly before him. When his blinded sight cleared, he found himself alone in the corridor—alone except for the dead. His four companions lay in their blood, heads and bosoms cleft and pierced. Blinded and dazed in that hell-born glare, they had died without an opportunity of defending themselves. The queen was gone.

With a bitter curse Valerius caught up his sword, tearing his cleft helmet from his head to clatter on the flags; blood ran down his cheek from a cut in his scalp.

Reeling, frantic with indecision, he heard a voice calling his name in desperate urgency: "Valerius! *Valerius!*"

He staggered in the direction of the voice, and rounded a corner just in time to have his arms filled with a soft, supple figure which flung itself frantically at him.

"Ivga! Are you mad!"

"I had to come!" she sobbed. "I followed you—hid in an arch of the outer court. A moment ago I saw *her* emerge with a brute who carried a woman in his arms. I knew it was Taramis, and that you had failed! Oh, you are hurt!"

"A scratch!" He put aside her clinging hands. "Quick, Ivga, tell me which way they went!"

"They fled across the square toward the temple."

He paled. "Ishtar! Oh, the fiend! She means to give Taramis to the devil she worships! Quick, Ivga! Run to the south wall where the people watch the battle! Tell them that their real queen has been found—that the impostor has dragged her to the temple! Go!"

Sobbing, the girl sped away, her light sandals pattering on the cobblestones, and Valerius raced across the court, plunged into the street, dashed into the square upon which it debouched, and raced for the great structure that rose on the opposite side.

His flying feet spurned the marble as he darted up the broad stair and through the pillared portico. Evidently their prisoner had given them some trouble. Taramis, sensing the doom intended for her, was fighting against it with all the strength of her splendid young body. Once she had broken away from the brutish priest, only to be dragged down again.

The group was half-way down the broad nave, at the other end of which stood the grim altar and beyond that the great metal door, obscenely carven, through which many had gone, but from which only Salome had ever emerged. Taramis' breath came in panting gasps; her tattered garment had been torn from her in the struggle. She writhed in the grasp of her apish captor like a white, naked nymph in the arms of a satyr. Salome watched cynically, though impatiently, moving toward the carven door, and from the dusk that lurked along the lofty walls the obscene gods and gargoyles leered down, as if imbued with salacious life.

Choking with fury, Valerius rushed down the great hall, sword in hand. At a sharp cry from Salome, the skull-faced priest looked up, then released Taramis, drew a heavy knife, already smeared with blood, and ran at the oncoming Khaurani.

But cutting down men blinded by the devil's flame loosed by Salome was different from fighting a wiry young Hyborian afire with hate and rage.

Up went the dripping knife, but before it could fall Valerius' keen narrow blade slashed through the air, and the fist that held the knife jumped from its wrist in a shower of blood. Valerius, berserk, slashed again and yet again before the crumpling figure could fall. The blade licked through flesh and bone. The skull-like head fell one way, the half-sundered torso the other.

Valerius whirled on his toes, quick and fierce as a jungle-cat, glaring about for Salome. She must have exhausted her fire-dust in the prison. She was bending over Taramis, grasping her sister's black locks in one hand, in the other lifting a dagger. Then with a fierce cry Valerius' sword was sheathed in her breast with such fury that the point sprang out between her shoulders. With an awful shriek the witch sank down, writhing in convulsions, grasping at the naked blade as it was withdrawn, smoking and dripping. Her eyes were inhuman, with a more than human vitality she clung to the life that ebbed through the wound that split the crimson crescent on her ivory bosom. She groveled on the floor, clawing and biting at the naked stones in her agony.

Sickened at the sight, Valerius stooped and lifted the half-fainting queen. Turning his back on the twisting figure upon the floor, he ran toward the door, stumbling in his haste. He staggered out upon the portico, halted at the head of the steps. The square thronged with people. Some had come at Ivga's incoherent cries, others had deserted the walls in fear of the onsweeping hordes out of the desert, fleeing unreasoningly toward the center of the city. Dumb resignation had vanished. The throng seethed and milled, yelling and screaming. Above the roar there sounded somewhere the splintering of stone and timbers.

A band of grim Shemites cleft the crowd –the guards of the northern gates, hurrying toward the south gate to reinforce their comrades there. They reined up short at sight of the youth on the steps, holding the limp, naked figure in his arms. The heads of the throng turned toward the temple; the crowd gaped, a new bewilderment added to their swirling confusion.

"Here is your queen!" yelled Valerius, straining to make himself understood above the clamor. The people gave back a bewildered roar. They did not understand, and Valerius sought in vain to lift his voice above their bedlam. The Shemites rode toward the temple steps, beating a way through the crowd with their spears.

Then a new grisly element introduced itself into the frenzy. Out of the gloom of the temple behind Valerius wavered a slim white figure, laced with crimson. The people screamed, there in the arms of Valerius hung the woman they thought their queen, yet there in the temple door staggered another figure, like a reflection of the other. Their brains reeled. Valerius felt his blood congeal as he stared at the swaying witch-girl. His sword had transfixed her, sundered her heart. She should be dead, by all laws of nature she should be dead. Yet there she swayed, on her feet, clinging horribly to life.

"Thaug!" she screamed, reeling in the doorway. "*Thaug!*" As in answer to that frightful invocation there boomed a thunderous croaking from within the temple, the snapping of wood and metal.

"That is the queen!" roared the captain of the Shemites, lifting his bow. "Shoot down the man and the other woman!"

But the roar of a roused hunting-pack rose from the people; they had guessed the truth at last, understood Valerius' frenzied appeals, knew that the girl who hung limply in his arms was their true queen. With a soul-shaking yell they surged on the Shemites, tearing and smiting with tooth and nail and naked hands, with the desperation of hard-pent fury loosed at last. Above them Salome swayed and tumbled down the marble stair, dead at last.

Arrows flickered about him as Valerius ran back between the pillars of the portico, shielding the body of the queen with his own. Shooting and slashing ruthlessly the mounted Shemites were holding their own with the maddened crowd. Valerius darted to the temple door—with one foot on the threshold he recoiled, crying out in horror and despair.

Out of the gloom at the other end of the great hall a vast dark form heaved up—came rushing toward him in gigantic frog-like hops. He saw the gleam of great unearthly eyes, the shimmer of fangs or talons. He fell back from the door, and then the whir of a shaft past his ear warned him that death was also behind him. He wheeled desperately. Four or five Shemites had cut their way through the throng and were spurring their horses up the steps, their bows lifted to shoot him down. He sprang behind a pillar, on which the arrows splintered. Taramis had fainted. She hung like a dead woman in his arms.

Before the Shemites could loose again, the doorway was blocked by a gigantic shape. With affrighted yells the mercenaries wheeled and began beating a frantic way through the throng, which crushed back in sudden, galvanized horror, trampling one another in their stampede.

But the monster seemed to be watching Valerius and the girl. Squeezing its vast, unstable bulk through the door, it bounded toward him, as he ran down the steps. He felt it looming behind him, a giant shadowy thing, like a travesty of nature cut out of the heart of night, a black shapelessness in which only the staring eyes and gleaming fangs were distinct.

There came a sudden thunder of hoofs; a rout of Shemites, bloody and battered, streamed across the square from the south, plowing blindly through the packed throng. Behind them swept a horde of horsemen yelling in a familiar tongue, waving red swords—the exiles, returned! With them rode fifty black-bearded desert riders, and at their head a giant figure in black mail.

"Conan!" shrieked Valerius. "*Conan!*"

The giant yelled a command. Without checking their headlong pace, the hundred men lifted their bows, drew and loosed. A cloud of arrows sang across the square, over the seething heads of the multitudes, and sank feather-deep in the black monster. It halted, wavered, reared, a black blot against the marble pillars. Again the sharp cloud sang, and yet again, and the horror collapsed and rolled down the steps, as dead as the witch who had summoned it out of the night of ages.

Conan drew rein beside the portico, leaped off. Valerius had laid the queen on the marble, sinking beside her in utter exhaustion. The people surged about, crowding in. The Cimmerian cursed them back, lifted her dark head, pillowed it against his mailed shoulder.

"By Crom, what is this? The real Taramis! But who is that yonder?"

"The demon who wore her shape," panted Valerius.

Conan swore heartily. Ripping a cloak from the shoulders of a soldier, he wrapped it about the naked queen. Her long dark lashes quivered on her cheeks, her eyes opened, stared up unbelievingly into the Cimmerian's scarred face.

"Conan!" Her soft fingers caught at him. "Do I dream? *She* told me you were dead——"

"Scarcely!" He grinned hardly. "You do not dream. You are queen of Khauran again. I broke Constantius, out there by the river. Most of his dogs never lived to reach the walls, for I gave orders that no prisoners be taken—except Constantius. The city guard closed the gate in our faces, but we burst it in with rams swung from our saddles. I left all my wolves outside, except this fifty. I didn't trust them in here, and these Khaurani lads were enough for the gate guards."

"It has been a nightmare!" she whimpered. "Oh, my poor people! You must help me try to repay them for all they have suffered, Conan, henceforth councilor as well as captain!"

Conan laughed, but shook his head. Rising, he set the queen upon her feet, and beckoned to a number of his Khaurani horsemen who had not continued the pursuit of the fleeing Shemites. They sprang from their horses, eager to do the bidding of their new-found queen.

"No, lass, that's over with. I'm chief of the Zuagirs now, and must lead them to plunder the Turanians, as I promised. This lad, Valerius, will make you a better captain than I. I wasn't made to dwell among marble walls, anyway. But I must leave you now, and complete what I've begun. Shemites still live in Khauran."

As Valerius started to follow Taramis across the square toward the palace, through a lane opened by the wildly cheering multitude, he felt a soft hand slipped timidly into his sinewy fingers and turned to receive the slender body of Ivga in his arms. He crushed her to him and drank her kisses with the gratitude of a weary fighter who has attained rest at last through tribulation and storm.

But not all men seek rest and peace, some are born with the spirit of the storm in their blood, restless harbingers of violence and bloodshed, knowing no other path. . . .

The sun was rising. The ancient caravan road was thronged with white-robed horsemen, in a wavering line that stretched from the walls of Khauran to a spot far out in the plain. Conan the Cimmerian sat at the head of that column, near the jagged end of a wooden beam that stuck up out of the ground. Near that stump rose a heavy cross, and on that cross a man hung by spikes through his hands and feet.

"Seven months ago, Constantius," said Conan, "it was I who hung there, and you who sat here."

Constantius did not reply, he licked his gray lips and his eyes were glassy with pain and fear. Muscles writhed like cords along his lean body.

"You are more fit to inflict torture than to endure it," said Conan tranquilly. "I hung there on a cross as you are hanging, and I lived, thanks to circumstances and a stamina peculiar to barbarians. But you civilized men are soft; your lives are not nailed to your spines as are ours. Your fortitude consists mainly in inflicting torment, not in enduring it. You will be dead before sundown. And so, Falcon of the desert, I leave you to the companionship of another bird of the desert."

He gestured toward the vultures whose shadows swept across the sands as they wheeled overhead. From the lips of Constantius came an inhuman cry of despair and horror.

Conan lifted his reins and rode toward the river that shone like silver in the morning sun. Behind him the white-clad riders struck into a trot; the gaze of each, as he passed a certain spot, turned impersonally and with the desert man's lack of compassion, toward the cross and the gaunt figure that hung there, black against the sunrise. Their horses' hoofs beat out a knell in the dust. Lower and lower swept the wings of the hungry vultures.

Bimini

by Bassett Morgan

With rare imaginative power and beauty of vision, Bassett Morgan's story of an arctic fountain of youth brings all the terror and fascination of the far polar places—the eternal mystery of ice caps whose aurora is a symphony of color, whose white fields are garbed in peace, and whose atmosphere is the chilling breath of death. With such ingredients, "Bimini" is a weird tale par excellence.

COMMANDER CRAYNE interrupted the tale by a gesture of his hand.

"Do you mind, Captain Ek, if I call Lieutenant Murphy in and have him take down what you are telling me? I'd like to check up on a few historical dates."

The old man nodded assent.

"It's what I want. Shows you're takin' int'rest. I've told some of this to several people. They think I'm crazy like you do, only they never got as far as takin' notes."

"Captain Ek, this is my aide, Lieutenant Murphy. He was with me on the polar flight. He is taking the brunt of this trip and I don't mind telling you that I'd rather take a dozen trips like our northern one than meet the crowds and dodge this publicity.—Murphy, Captain Ek is telling of a trip he made north. Please make a note of places he mentions and data."

Lieutenant Murphy, was one of those Americans who "don't have to come from Ireland to be Irish." Stormy black lashes "set in with a smutty finger" hid twinkling blue eyes as he looked at Captain Ek, whose white hair and silvery beard were close trimmed, whose leathery brown skin showed fine wrinkles, and whose general appearance gave the impression of a man prematurely white.

Commander Crayne, whose name still occupied newspaper headlines to overflowing columns of his achievement in circling the North Pole and remaining in its vicinity long enough to make valuable discoveries which no other polar explorer had done, sat near the window. His face was in shadow and did not reveal the incredulity of his mind at the tale Captain Ek had been telling. He had not been impatient. So many visitors had called during his trip south, and since he arrived in San Francisco, that Murphy had stationed himself door dragon to keep them away. But even Murphy relented toward Captain Ek. The old seaman's bearing was kindly, and commanding. Then, too, he had given Murphy a brief outline of a proposition for Commander Crayne to consider.

"I was sayin'," continued Captain Ek, "that we left Fort Chipewyan in the early spring, 1789, and to make a long story short, got to the Arctic Sea. I've gone over that trail again but I can't get the waterline we found. I lost Mackenzie. We'd had some words, and anyway he was crazier to reach the Pacific than to go north."

"Murphy, you've got that date, 1789," Commander Crayne interpolated. "Remember Chicago wasn't born then. I'm not sure, but I don't believe even Fort Dearborn was in existence on the site of Chicago. Seventeen eighty-nine," he mused. "George the Third was reigning in England. Arkwright was making his spinning jenny and Watts working on his steam engine. Burns was busy with his poems. Lord Byron was a baby. The French Revolution was at its height. America as a nation was about twelve years old. And Captain Ek says he was on his way north."

"It's jake with me," commented Murphy, "he made a bigger noise than that when I was listening first."

For an hour or more, Commander Crayne listened to the account of Captain Ek, fascinated by a story that was interlocked with data and detail, yet fantastic beyond belief. Then the old man took a checkbook from his pocket and unscrewed the cap of a fountain pen.

"You don't believe this, young man," he said, "and I don't blame you none. But they's a sayin' in this country that money talks! What I told you for was to get you to take a trip north on my account. I want to git back to that big bowl in the earth. I can pay for the job and maybe make it worth your while. What will it take for flying-machines that'll be able to stay there a couple or three months if necessary?"

"Offhand, I couldn't tell you, Captain Ek. But I've great faith in a machine the English are making, and with a few improvements of my own, I think she'd do. It would cost a good deal."

"You'll go, then?" asked the old man.

"Certainly, if it can be managed."

Captain Ek filled out a check, tore it loose and handed it to Crayne, who looked at it, then slowly smiled, and returned it.

"I'll put this in the bank," said the old man. "They'll let you know it's there for you to draw on. Now get busy, sir."

He rose and held out his hand, which Crayne grasped. He felt a spontaneous liking for Captain Ek, and a vast pity. There was no doubt the old fellow was mad, but his tale had held both young men deeply interested, and he had surprised them by his exact knowledge of polar conditions, his figures and dates, his nautical bearings and astronomical observations. Crayne, a stickler for detail and with a prodigious memory, found no flaw

The romantic stuff he discounted. That Captain Ek claimed to have been a [illegible] man of twenty-one in 1789, and on his way north with MacKenzie [illegible] Canadian northwest, he viewed as the wanderings of an aged man's mind.

He bade Captain Ek good-bye, and returned to sit on a corner of the table looking at Murphy.

"That check was drawn to my name, and for one and a half million dollars on the First National Bank of San Francisco," Crayne said, then threw [illegible] his head and laughed. "For a bone-dry day, I have a dissipated feeling."

An hour later Commander Crayne was summoned to the telephone and heard a voice announce that the manager of the First National Bank was speaking. He informed Commander Crayne that Captain Christian Ek had [illegible] and a half million dollars to his credit, and the bank would honor checks on sight but requested three days' notice if the drafts were over thirty thousand cash.

Crayne's voice was husky as he thanked the manager and clicked the receiver on its hook.

"[illegible]," he said to Murphy, "it's true. Kick me, punch me, it'll be your [illegible] chance. Nobody is going to lay hands on me if I'm worth that much, after this minute."

"You gotta buy a plane, and get back here to enjoy it," said the unromantic Murphy. "How about sidesteppin' a lotta dinners and celebrations in your honor, and gettin' across after the plane? The sooner we find that bowl up north and the old man dips hisself in glory water, the sooner we come [illegible] and settle up. I owe a Post Street tailor for a pearl gray suit."

Which was one reason the triumphal trip of Commander Crayne was suddenly cancelled, and he and Lieutenant Murphy left for England, while Captain Ek's ship, a big auxiliary schooner, started her cruise through the [illegible] and via New York, where she received word from Crayne that he would be ready to proceed north in a fortnight.

Seven days later Crayne and Murphy watched Captain Ek's ship, the [illegible], dock, and went aboard her for the first time. It was not the build of the schooner, two hundred feet long by forty beam, her oak hull and [illegible] oak and pine planking, her thousand horse power engine, and canvas [illegible] masts, which interested Crayne so much as the charts and crude drawings spread on the cabin table. Over these he pored for a long time. Captain Ek had made many attempts to find the vast depression at the earth's northern tip where he said he had found the source of that beautiful and [illegible] known as the Aurora Borealis.

Two weeks stretched into three before the thousand horse power [illegible] airplane was stowed safely on the [illegible], and during that interval Murphy heard there was considerable gossip at clubs and gatherings, which he detailed to Crayne over a good-night cigar.

"Course, they make fun of him some, but he's not only got the dough and the [illegible] that their grandfathers knew about

I've read his story. It's funny. He can't be real. They don't make 'em that old—and if they did, he couldn't be that spry. What's the name o' that bird guy that went to Florida after a fountain of youth?"

"Ponce de Leon," supplied Crayne. "The island he searched for was said to be in the Bahama group, and was called Bimini."

"Well, this Cap'n. Me, I [illegible] that [illegible] must ha' been readin' about this here Bimini and never woke up."

Dodging bergs and floes along the Labrador coast and into the ice of Baffin Bay, Commander Crayne had leisure to read the record made by Captain Ek, one page in his native Norwegian, the translation in quaint English on the opposite page; and again he marveled as observations taken on their trip corresponded. The *Aurora* was equipped with the latest inventions of science for "finding" ice.

A sonic depth finder interested Murphy and a Swedish scientist, Bjornsen, deeply, but Crayne learned that Captain Ek had a weird instinct which acted more quickly than the instruments. He was standing with the captain on the bridge one moonlight night when suddenly, Captain Ek jerked the engine-room telegraph and jammed the wheel hard over. A few moments later Murphy rushed up and stood at the rail staring over the sea. It was several minutes before the gigantic ghostly mass of ice appeared faintly luminous against the stars.

"Lucky you felt her chill," yelped Murphy. "We heard the engine telegraph before that berg made a sign on the jigger."

"I need no such contraptions," said the old man to Crayne.

"I've noticed that, sir," Crayne answered, "but how do you get warning?"

"They tell me—the children of light."

Crayne was silent. Captain Ek had used that term in his story of the Sea of Light, beyond the magnetic pole. The cold air off the vast ice cap of Greenland was crisp and electric. Crayne wondered if it affected the old man as the moon is said to affect animal life of the lower orders, and those whose wits are wandering. Even he began to feel the "wingedness" of his flesh in that electric-charged air of high latitudes.

It was under the great hills of Meteorite Island that Crayne realized that Captain Ek's story had a considerable foundation of truth, for the ship was hailed by Eskimos on shore with undoubted welcome.

At Cape York, kayaks darted about the *Aurora* and shouts of "*Nalegak*" greeted them. They hailed Captain Ek as a great chieftain. Landing, the party was escorted enthusiastically to the village and a feast provided in a large communal igloo. The laughing, chattering Eskimos were instantly interested in Murphy, who had brought a banjo and regaled them with jazz, but, missing the Captain, Crayne went in search of him and found him on a gray point of rock in the starlight, his arms outstretched while he repeated in a sonorous voice Norwegian words, as of pleading and passion.

He turned casually to Crayne. "They know I am coming, my friend; the

Children of Light are here. And She, who is keeper of my soul, awaits me yonder.'

Again Crayne kept silence. He felt the electric tingling of his skin and hair under fox furs, as if soft fingers caressed him. There was no wind stirring; it was a night of calm silence, and the black sea and the ghostly bergs were all that eye could see. Yet Crayne saw the pulsing of the aurora take strange forms, like radiant creatures of dream fantasy, with streaming gossamers of green and rosette light. They swung over the heavens and dimmed the stars, and swept closer to earth. They floated in a ring of splendor, as if dancing about a circle in the center of which he and the captain stood.

"A marvelous night," he murmured, his voice constricted and strange in his own ears. Captain Ek dropped a hand on Crayne's arm for silence, and immediately sounded music fragile as tinkling glass, or violin bows drawn over crystal goblets.

Again Captain Ek spoke in his sonorous voice, and it seemed to draw the sweeping, swirling creatures of light nearer, until the radiance was so dazzling that Crayne closed his eyes. He heard a sigh that was almost a moan, and opening his eyes again, he found that he stood alone outside the radiance, which enveloped Captain Ek like a flame. Then it was gone, and the night was bafflingly dark after the splendor which had flown like a wind-driven cloud due north.

Captain Ek walked without a word to the igloo, followed by Crayne, who was shaken by that baptism of light and the fantastic optical delusion it produced.

For two weeks there was constant work, hunting and providing caches of food, stocking the *Aurora* with fresh meat, and selecting native crews and dogs in case of emergency. Then, with decks almost awash and fuzzy with dogs and fur-clad natives, the *Aurora* headed between the bergs of Smith Sound and made for Grant Land. Bitter cold fought them with fangs and claws. There were cutting winds, blinding drifts, and ice, but miraculously the *Aurora* plowed through until she lay at last on the north shore of Grant Land, and it was time to unload the Birmingham plane which Crayne and Murphy had been getting in order for quick lightering.

She was to carry Captain Ek, Crayne, Murphy, Bjornsen, two mechanics and a Negro cook, and none except the commander and his aide knew the story told by Captain Ek. It was a new route to Crayne, and he had only the stars, the compass, and the captain's sketchy drawings to guide him. Yet, equipped with the last and best aids of science for protection and physical necessity, Crayne had no misgivings about the journey when they hopped off from the ice field with a comparatively smooth sweep and left the little *Aurora* and her crew, and the natives like motes on the vast frozen wilderness.

The Birmingham had a speed of four hundred miles an hour, with a hundred and ninety to make before she reached the magnetic pole. Head winds cut her speed amazingly, yet in the grey twilight that breathes between morning and evening stars, they crossed that plot of no man's land which is the magnetic north.

In the protected cabin cockpit of the Birmingham, with ear tubes connecting them, Crayne called to Captain Ik and pointed below. But the old man's eyes gazed beyond.

"See!" he cried. "The Bowl! The Bowl!"

Far off against the stars, light shone. It was like the reflection of a fire, the glow from a volcano crater. And as if disturbed by some upheaval from earth's center, streamers of light puffed out and were blown to that marvelous display that men call the northern lights. They pulsed over the bowl of night sky, and blew toward the Birmingham. Crayne felt his hair lifting his fur hood and his skin tingling as gossamers streamed toward the plane and circled it. Glancing at Murphy, he saw the boy's face weirdly illumined, and his eyes staring.

"If you see what I see, you're crazy," shouted Murphy, but although his lips were drawn from his strong white teeth, Murphy was not smiling. Commander Crayne was uneasy. It was enough that he saw those woman forms shaping from the mist, but when Murphy, matter-of-fact, hard-boiled youngster, saw them, Crayne could only marvel and control as best he might the flighty feeling of fear clutching him.

It was then that one of the mechanics reported water leaking from a cracked cylinder, and with a feeling of relief that he had an excuse other than his own apprehension, Crayne signaled to Murphy that they would land if possible to find fairly smooth grounding.

Murphy managed a smile instead of his grimace of tightly drawn lips, and the plane began to circle lower as Crayne made out a comparatively level stretch of frozen sea, but they were still traveling at top speed, and the wind that had harassed them was gone.

The Bowl of Light came nearer, uncomfortably nearer, a vast sea of pale flame which bubbled to the black rims of the depression and spurted what appeared to be like colored steam of many hues.

Crayne felt that he dared not attempt to fly over it with a leaking cylinder. Yet as Captain Ik realized they were lowering, he leaned near Crayne and bellowed in voice of rage, the first sign of temper he had shown on a voyage trying to the best-natured:

"Go on! Why do you halt now? See, they wait to welcome us, the Children of Light!"

Crayne howled the information about the cylinder, adding that he would later circle the Bowl, and finishing sternly: "I am commander, Captain Ik. Please remember."

The Birmingham circled lower until within five hundred yards, and Crayne saw that what appeared to be smooth ice was a crumpled, humped expanse, yet there was nothing to do but land cautiously. He nursed the big machine as best he could, felt her wheels bump, then heard an ominous crack, and she tilted and slid with one wing tip touching. The propeller whirred more slowly, and stopped.

Murphy was out of the enclosed cockpit cabin immediately.

"Cracked axle as well," he shouted. "But that ain't what's got my goat. Look at them lights! Do I see 'em, or am I just plain nuts?"

Captain Ek showed the muscular grace and strength of a boy as he dropped from the open cabin door, then ran over the snow.

"Children of the Light," he howled back at them, his arm pointing to the heavens. "Now do you believe the story I told you back there in San Francisco?"

"Not much children," growled Murphy. "Flappers maybe but nifty. Bathing girl choruses ain't got a thing on them babies. And if you see 'em, then I ain't loco, Capt'n."

Crayne stared from beside the plane. Bjornson joined him, and the Negro came toward them lifting his fur-clad feet high and treading carefully as if he feared to startle the lowering radiance that swung about the sky and trailed light in wheels and whorls over the ice, and were indubitably shaping to the figures of women, nude except for their gossamers of pulsing hues.

Nearer, closer they came. Crayne saw rosy arms stretch out to join hands, and their fairy feet tripped over the frozen hummocks which glittered under the luminance like jewels. There was sound like ice tinkling in glass, rising to bell chime, and wind of unearthly sweet voices. It took sequence and rhythm and became song. And such song! It chilled and warmed. It was ice and fire contending, whipping blood to flame, pulsing over flesh through their furs, bathing them in exquisite rapturousness. It was as if stars danced and clashed together, the music of the spheres. Under that poignant and sensuous flood of light and sound, they stood dumb. Even the voluble Murphy was silent, and Crayne saw in his eyes the reflection of that light and on his face a weird unearthly expression.

He reached out to touch Murphy's arm, then clutched it. The boy did not move, seemed unaware of his touch.

Spellbound, they gazed, until rapture became painful, the heart-searing ache that is bred of unutterable beauty in those rare moments when flesh seems to drop away and the spirit free itself.

It was Captain Ek who broke the spell, to Crayne's infinite relief. With outstretched arms he ran toward the dancing circle, which parted and drew aside, and down silver luminance like a moon pathway from the flames of the Bowl walked a Titania of the North!

She seemed fashioned of ice tinted like human flesh, yet transparent. Her long fair hair swayed as on a gentle wind and swirled to her bare pink feet. Glittering light draped her from shoulder to ankle, blazing one moment like fabric sewn with diamonds, gleaming like fire the next. A smile of soothing sweetness moved her lips, and a glitter like fallen stars scattered where she moved.

They saw Captain Ek run forward to meet her, saw his uplifted arms and realized that he stood at her feet and his great height reached scarcely above her arched instep. They saw her head bend and a marvelous smile change her face; then she swept one arm and covered him with her glittering mantle, and the song of the dancers rose like a vast wind between the worlds, then gradually grew softer until it was again the chime of bells, the tinkle of ice. As it diminished, the radiant figure merged into the fringes of the pulsing aurora, and was swept away.

They stood mute and motionless. Crayne heard the Negro's teeth chattering like castanets, felt the piercing cold, and motioned him toward the cabin.

Not a word was spoken as the men followed Mose. Crayne waited for Captain Ek, who had turned and came slowly, laboriously, toward the plane. He put out a hand to catch the old man, who was swaying on his feet. But he was amazed at the bitter cry that came:

"You have seen them. You have seen Her, who has waited for me this century or more. Now, for the love of your God, will you go forward? Grant me that one mercy, that I can bathe in the cold fire of that Light which vitalizes this puny earth, and join my Mate."

Crayne did not answer then. He got the old man into the cabin, and found the others still silent, except Murphy, who in low tones was hurrying the efforts of the badly shaken cook to serve hot soup and coffee.

Captain Ek lay on a narrow couch with closed eyes until Crayne touched him and proffered a steaming cup.

"Come, sir, you're cold as we all are. Drink this."

The old man opened eyes misted with dreams, stared about him, then shook his great body, and, reaching for the cup, swallowed it at a draft.

"How long," he cried, "how long will it be?"

"A day, Captain Ek," said Crayne quietly. "But I don't want to promise the impossible. I am as anxious as you to approach nearer that crater."

"You will fly over it. You will see the source of all life on this earth. You will land beside it where I can walk to the Bridge and bathe once more in the flame of life and death. Don't quibble now, Crayne. I have paid for this; paid as never man paid before. You will, if you have the guts, go back with such wealth that you can buy this earth. There in that Bowl is the stuff men call radium. I'm not asking you to believe that. You wouldn't believe. You didn't believe when I told you of the Bowl and the Children of Light. Now that you've seen them, I'll tell it all. These others have seen. They shall hear!

"I was born one hundred and sixty years ago," said the old man, "sea-born, on my father's fishing-boat in the North Sea.

"He had run away with my mother, the daughter of a wealthy thane, without time for a marriage ceremony; and because of her love for him she accepted his belief in the old gods of the Northland, Odin, Thor, and the reward of Valhalla. I was sixteen when we were wrecked off the north shores of Newfoundland when our vessel struck a berg in a fog. I saw the Valkyries carry the souls of my parents to that heaven of our belief. I heard the voice of my mother call down the wind, 'Go north.' I had seldom touched foot on shore, had never found a sweetheart, and in my great loneliness when a little French smack found and took me, half frozen, ashore. I had one purpose in life -- to find the mother who had been the only loving sweetness I had known.

"No matter how, I had happened to fall in with explorers. Much of it I have forgotten. But it was with MacKenzie I made the first trip to the Arctic Sea through the Canadas."

Here Crayne interrupted the old man to say, "I have made inquiries and find Captain Ek's story of MacKenzie's outfitting at Fort Chipewyan is true. He started from there in 1789 for the Arctic. Here, also, Franklin outfitted for his two land journeys in 1820 and 1825. The name of Christian Ek is recorded on all three expeditions. Go on, Captain Ek."

"There was a girl at that wilderness fort, a young thing with fair hair, sweet as the wild flowers, straight and strong as a young pine, always laughing until we were leaving. Then I missed her and could not say farewell."

A shaking hand brushed across the old man's eyes as if to clear the mists, and he continued: "I found her among the members of our company, dressed in buckskins, like a boy, taking her share of the work, suffering the hardships, with never a complaint nor shirking a task. It was not until we reached the booming breakers of the Arctic Sea that any but me learned there was a woman with us. Then the beast that lives in all men broke forth. Not crueller is this North than human brutes. She, who had taken her place as courageously as they, was hunted, and I alone stood between her and the wolf pack to which they had changed. That fight was of one against many, of knives and fists, and I went down, but not before she was free, and I had seen the wraith of my mother flying under the stars, seen that dear Shade lift my sweetheart, and fly with her north.

You will say it was a dream of the cold. But I say I saw the Valkyries, heard their cry, the ringing of steel in that music of the Shades. And as they swept away they beckoned me.

"Of that journey over the frozen North, the ice, the storms, the whirling snow, I have only the memory of their voices singing. You have heard that song which I followed. Sometimes they swept about me in Light, warmed my chilled heart, strengthened my limbs. And I came at last to the Bowl, bridged with the Rainbow Arch, and I believed it was Valhalla. There they danced, as you have seen them dance, and I saw the face of my Woman who awaited me on that Bridge of Light. I had started across when the voice of her who was my mother called me back. Instantly the air was filled with cries urging me forward, and She who was so new a Shade stood with downcast eyes and would not draw me by their lovelight when my Mother called me back.

"Who hesitates on the Arch of Valhalla is doomed. I had known only two loves -- mother love and love for a mate that was as yet new and strange and awakening, that birth of love that is yet of the flesh and not winged with spirit. And in that struggle between Her who had sought to [illegible] youth and Her who nurtured the soul of me, I went down.

"I turned back to where my Mother stood, wept, turned again to the sweet Shade on the Arch. My faltering feet fumbled. The torrent of the flood caught me, and I fell, not into the white flame that would have welded me to those Shades of Valhalla, but into the Bowl of Light which cleanses flesh of vulnerability but does not transmute it to Spirit. And the Shade that was my Mother drew me to the rim of the Bowl, wrapped me in her arms, carried me over the ice fields and left me lying on a sun-warmed valley far from the coast.

Waking from sleep, I found friends in the Eskimos, and the Bowl and Bridge, the Shades of Mother and Maid, were like a dream. But in the southland to which I came in time, I learned the truth of that baptism of Light. I could not die. Years passed. One gift they had given me, for when I wakened my hand clutched a great lump of some substance that held strange gleams and power to revitalize flesh after exhaustion. I carried it with me as a symbol of that dream of mine. It never left my side, and when I had reached the three-score mark and it seemed as if death could not be far removed, I journeyed to my Mother's home in Norway. Life was kind to me. Prosperity smiled always, and yet I was lonely, and had come home, I who had never known a home save the little ship on the ocean waves, had sought my Mother's home to die.

"I was able to buy the old house and land. And there in a valley protected from the bitter winds by tall cliffs, I placed the stone I had brought from the Bowl of Light, as a monument for her I had lost, and for myself, when my time should come.

"But death had no gift for me, no power to free me from flesh. My hair, white from that hour near Valhalla, was the only sign of age. I reached a hundred years, the loneliest man on earth. Men I knew were dead. Their sons were old men, and still I lived, trying to fill the days, cursed with a Midas gift, for everything to which my hand turned brought gold.

"It was then I sought death, wooed it as I had never wooed the Maid, and found that I could not die. There, in my log, you will find the newspaper clippings of times when death killed better men and passed me by.

"Meanwhile, seeking it, I went to the valley in bitter winter cold stripped to an undergarment, and lay with my head on the snow that covered the fragment of the Bowl. Instead of the frozen corpse that morning should have found, I was like a youth, and I had dreamed of my Mother and Her. Their voices told me to carry the stone far away and with it enrich man—a strange message and one I was many years interpreting. But I did buy a ship and set sail, and followed the path of the setting sun. Gales that wrecked that ship and drowned my crew, tossed me to land, and always I wakened to start forth again with that dream of dear Shades urging me to make use of the fragment of the Bowl.

"But the night of the North goes on and I must make this story end. You would be as weary of an account of a century and a half of one man's life as I should be in telling it. It is enough to say that in time my stubborn brain did fathom that command, and when I met a scientist of my own land I asked him to accompany me to my home. It lies on a fiord of the north coast of Norway, a bleak place, cold even in the brief summer, but my valley was like the southland. Orange trees I had planted, scented the sea-wind, flowers grew as they do in Italy. The country people looked on me as a man of evil and the valley as accursed."

As the old man halted and sighed, Bjornsen the scientist cleared his throat and spoke: "I found the valley as Captain Ek has stated, and found the reason. It was underlain with that substance which is described by the word pitchblende, and rich in radium."

Captain Ek nodded.

"Wealth? I had more than a man could need; then the valley yielded its treasure, vaster than South African diamond mines. That fragment of the Bowl of Light had worked ceaselessly. I was richer than Aladdin, and lonelier than hell. No whimpering naked soul yammering at the gates of the damned was so alone. If I made friends, I outlived them, and for me there was no earthly love. Then evil came. I wanted to die, tried to die. Poison affected me not at all, for I tried it. I endured the agony and lived. And in dreams the Shades warned me I must not die a coward. Yet I tried. A train in front of which I threw myself was derailed and passengers injured when they put on brakes. A speeding automobile before which I stepped was smashed, and I was uninjured.

"I had tried to reach the Bowl, not once but many times; but in vain. Then came the chance with Commander Crayne. The rest you know. And now, my friends, the Bowl is near and I have tried to expiate my sin of cowardice. The hour is near when I shall again set feet on the Rainbow Arch and know if I have attained to the merit required of those warrior souls who reach Valhalla."

He ceased to speak and lay back on the couch. There was a long silence in which the deep breathing of the others was the only audible sound. It was broken by Murphy.

"Pitchblende and radium." He looked at Professor Bjornsen. "No foolin'?" he whispered.

"The truth," said the professor, "so far as the valley is concerned."

"And you think he really did find a fountain of Youth?" asked Commander Crayne quietly, his eyes turning to the couch where Captain Ek lay apparently asleep, his bronzed skin fresh and youthful in spite of the deeply chiseled lines of life's [illegible] scrawl.

"He's a hundred an' fifty. I ain't born," muttered Murphy. "Bimini, [illegible] was the name of that place this here Ponce de Leon was after. Why didn't he come here instead of the West Indies?"

"You must remember, Murphy, that science has pretty well established the fact that the tropics, at one period of the earth's existence, covered the poles. Remains of mammoths and mastodons have frequently been found in polar regions, even preserved in the ice. But Ponce de Leon was too late for that. No doubt the vast majority of legends which filled the heads [illegible] of [illegible], and were handed down from tribe to tribe by word of mouth before [illegible] writing was in its earliest beginnings. I have taken time and trouble to corroborate the log, a diary which Captain Ek kept through the years. It is an invaluable account of the world's progress, and the books occupy shelves of one wall in his Norwegian home. He has graciously and generously willed them to me at his death. And I have faith enough in the truth of his strange story, that I have entrusted them to my son and grandson, fearing that I shall not be alive to give them to the world."

"But pitchblende and radium!" said Murphy again. "If a guy broke off a chunk of that there Bimini Bowl stuff, he'd have a reg'lar diamond mine in his own back yard, huh?"

"Look here," the voice of Commander Crayne was stern. "I want no risks taken by any of this company. You are under orders to obey me implicitly on this cruise. I am not questioning Captain Ek's veracity, nor casting doubt upon his story, but I forbid any man to leave the vicinity of this plane, or the company of the rest of us for a single instant, until we again reach the *Aurora* at Grant's Land. Professor Bjornsen, you realize as I do, that Captain Ek must not be allowed to endanger his life up here. My orders were to bring him north. My own duty is to return this company sound and uninjured, and I propose to do that to the best of my ability."

The scientist nodded.

"Now boys," the commander's tone was lighter, "better get some sleep. We'll repair this plane, circle the Bowl if possible, then start south, every man of us!" He emphasized his words by a thump of his fist on the tiny table.

A smile crossed the face of the sleeping patriarch toward whom their eyes had turned.

"Bimini," breathed Murphy. "An' radium. Boy, oh boy, with a chunk o' that, and a dip around the brim, a man could sit pretty!"

Wrapped in fur parkas, they lay tightly packed in the small cabin of the Birmingham, yet it was not sleep which held them motionless through nine hours of repose. Crayne had scarcely closed his eyes than, like a fairy echo of that music of the Shades they had heard, came again the sound of song, poignantly sweet, so high pitched that their nerves vibrated to music too acute for the eardrums to register. The aurora played between earth and the stars, but to Crayne there was the sensation of satin-smooth arms cradling his head, holding his body to the breast of some sweetness indescribable. And song coaxed him away. He could not translate those faint, fragile meanings of the music, but he understood. Nor could he shake off their enfolding caresses. Troubled by warnings of the flesh, he tried to free himself, in vain.

It was the Negro who drew him back from an abyss, for a clutch on his arm and a powerful shake roused him when he had already opened the cabin door.

"Fo' Lord's sake, C'mander, shet dat do'. Whah you-all goin' in de col'?"

Crayne slumped back, heard the door click shut, and brushed his eyes with the rough fur sleeve of his coat. He blinked at Mose, whose eyes showed their rolling whites in the starlight shining through the thick glass plate of the port holes. Then he looked about him. Captain Ek was still on the couch, Bjornsen and the mechanics were huddled together, but Murphy was missing.

"Mose, where's Bud?" cried Crayne, and the others stirred at his cry.

"He was gone when I woke up, C'mander. I was dreamin' dat de lights had me, an' dey was laughin' dey heads off an' dancin' around, when somethin' cold hit ma face; den de do' shet. I guess dat was when he went."

"Boys, wake up, Murphy's gone!" yelled Crayne. He was already wrapping himself securely in his furs and tying his hood. "We've got to get him. The boy's lost his head."

A quick glance showed Murphy's furs and gun-belt missing. Crayne did not wait for the others. He plunged from the cabin and was running over the snow, sure that they would follow, and as he ran he saw against that Light of the Bowl reflected like flame from a forest fire on the vast vault of sky, a small dark form.

Crayne called. The night was deathly still, the vast fringes of the aurora wavering thinly in gold and rose and emerald tints. His voice carried a long way, for he saw the running figure of Murphy throw up his arm as a sign he had heard, and plunge on.

Crayne followed, leaving the others far behind. He was aware of the increased radiance of the northern lights streaming from that crater of jagged upthrust brim which looked black on the snow. Running as he had never run before, he was past the first heart breaking sob and gasp of breath and settling into firmer stride when he was aware of his body's warmth and realized that if he began to sweat it would mean frozen lungs, pneumonia and death. And the party were dependent on him for their return. Yet Murphy was close to the Light, a small black shape speeding, leaping, plunging on until it seemed to Crayne he might at any moment plunge over the top and down.

Already the glow of that strange cauldron was blinding. Crayne snatched goggles from a pocket of his coat and put them over his eyes. The eyeballs burned as with snow blindness. The air was alive with the sound of rushing flame, hissing, sputtering, whistling noises, and behind, the faint cries of the others who followed were lost in that sound from the Bowl. Crayne saw Murphy's pace slacken and heaved a sigh of relief as it was momentarily lost in the darkness of the crater foot, then apparent again as the boy climbed upward until his head was above the serrated edge. There he waited, and then turned back. Crayne reached the crater foot and began to climb.

"Murphy, you fool, come back!" he shouted, and as if his voice had called the Nymphs of Light from their abiding place, the crimson steam from the Bowl shot to the stars and broke from a ruddy cloud into those woman forms that floated above, and they began their dance on the very brim of the crater.

Crayne reached Murphy's side, and clutched his arm. The boy's face was illumined by lurid light, his strong teeth flashing as he laughed joyously in the presence of that dreadful radiance.

"Maybe I'm dreamin'," he shouted "but I ain't the only one asleep. They come right in that cockpit, I tell you. Boy, oh boy! They had me outa that door before I knew it. An' now I'm here, I'm goin' over the top!"

"But, Bud, don't be a fool. They're not real. It's a trick of the eyes. It's electric-charged air and too much nonsense from Captain Ek."

"I don't care a damn what it is, an' women don't git my goat, but I'm goin' t' have a chunk o' wealth an' a swim in Bimini. An' nobody's goin' t' stop me now!"

Crayne clutched at Murphy, whose fists shot out, but the older, taller man swung his long arms from behind and pinioned Murphy's arms. Then began a struggle of desperation on the slope of the outer rim, and above danced the Children of Light, nearer and nearer, their song of joy changing to one of sorrow. Crayne was aware of Grief filling the world, aware that the curse of Babel was gone in that center of earth and that he understood their song of mourning over dissent among men.

As if the Light disclosed the workings of human minds to their eyes, the Nymphs sang of Love, pleading with these two humans to aspire to the spirit instead of lusting for wealth that would mock and betray.

Crayne realized a flash of shame as they read his own longing to possess such wealth, yet it was still controlled. His one desire was to save this boy from death, and Murphy was dragging him nearer and nearer that topmost brim. He realized the Children of Light kept at a distance. The visitation and wooing of the night was changed to aloofness as they darted to and fro, sweeping their gossamer drapes in maddening and dazzling glitter so close that it webbed the two struggling men like a gladiator's net, and in those veils they were helpless. Then came a rustling as of gigantic wings unfolding, and locked in each other's arms, powerless to move hand or foot, Crayne and Murphy stared at the swirling maelstrom of the Bowl and saw an arch curve upward, springing like a rainbow, and sweeping her gleaming robes about her came the royal figure they had seen on the silver path after their arrival.

A voice came, piercing and silverclear. It touched understanding, and without words they knew their punishment decreed. It was as if She commanded. "Give them the desire of the eyes, my Maidens."

Crayne felt the scream in his own throat but heard no sound as the Bowl brim crumbled beneath his feet and he fell with Murphy into an abyss of such terrific Light that sight was gone. He felt the lave and spray and caress of Light, piercing, dissolving flesh. They sank as in the sea and came up on tongues of crimson flame washed over the Bowl brim, at which both clutched spasmodically, then lay still, clutched in their combined grip, to stare at that rainbow arch which still quivered and pulsed over the Bowl.

They knew the others had arrived. They heard the clear sound of bell chime, the song of the spheres. They saw Captain Ek at the Bowl brim ridding the grasp of Bjornsen and the two mechanics, but he shook off their detaining hands as if they were the fingers of children. Then the queenly figure soared and winged above the arch, remained poised between earth and stars, and from that circle of dancing Nymphs came a young figure, golden-haired, warm-tinted, straight and strong, with her eyes downcast. And up the gleaming Arch toward her Captain Ek went. They saw that his face was suddenly young, his body slender, and he wore the look of youth.

There was one moment he stood clear against the glory, then her arms lifted, enfolded him, and the Arch was one arc of a wheel that revolved slowly as man and maid descended into the white central flame, and whirled faster and faster until human endurance broke before that vast and dreadful radiance.

Yet Crayne was not unconscious. He realized that the Light was gone except for the stars and soft aurora and that he was being carried over the hummocks and stretched on the couch of the Birmingham cabin. He was wakened in time by the sound of hammering as the mechanics repaired the broken wheel axle and leaking cylinder. He felt Murphy sit on the side of the couch and clutch his wrist, and when he opened his eyes, Murphy was grinning.

"We got it," he said, "an' we got it good. Little lump o' rock it looks like. And we went for a swim in Bimini. Boy, oh boy, I'm only waitin' to try out that there youthstuff back home! But"—his grin was sobered and his voice slightly hushed—"the old man got across. And Bjornsen's gone."

"Bjornsen?" cried Crayne, jerking upright.

"Yeah. Nobody thought of him goin'. The ol' captain shook 'im off like a terrier shakes a rat, an' went. An' the wheel began to turn, they said, an' Bjornsen ran out on one o' the spokes an' the flames caught him, an' he was gone. They's just the two mechs an' Mose, an' you an' me. An' the boat'll be ready in an hour or so. An' here's all we got to show for that dip into glory water."

Murphy rolled two objects that looked like fragments of black glass, flaked unevenly, and, touching them, Crayne felt a tingling as of a mild galvanic battery charge, which was not so much sensation to the fingers as of ceaselessly working energy of the mass.

"Mose decided they was black diamonds, an' he's bin cuddlin' 'em ever [illegible], an' it's a funny thing but his wool is white as ours and losin' its marcel kink."

"White—ours?" asked Crayne.

Murphy snatched a tiny dressing mirror from the wall and thrust it into Crayne's hand, then pulled off his fur cap. The boy's young face was framed in snow white curls. Crayne looked in the mirror and saw his own ruddy thatch was the color of ivory. His arms went out, his hand touched Murphy, and suddenly the boy had clutched him in a tight grasp of young arms.

"Maybe it's real, an' it's you an' me alone some day. We'd better keep on speakin' terms." He tried to laugh, then suddenly dashed from the cabin.

In three hours the Birmingham was repaired and tested, and they set to work smoothing a stretch of ice where she could race for the take-off. In the galley cubby, Mose was singing jazz, and between preparations for meal, darting to the mirror to stare at his white, straight hair. An excited but silent company took their last look at the reflection of that vast and awful source of the world's atomic energy, the light of which men call the Aurora Borealis.

Then the flight began, and with it an eery moaning of winds that blow between the worlds. They stood at salute, faces toward the Bowl, a gesture of honor and farewell to Captain Ek and Bjornsen.

Then came the fight with gales that howled, drove frozen snow like flails in a constant tattoo on the wings and body of the Birmingham, until she was tossed like a bird. The weary mechanics slept. Crayne was at the throttle. Mose crouched in a heap with the fragments of rock in his arms, his teeth chattering as he saw the strain on the faces of Crayne and Murphy.

Suddenly Crayne cried out, and Murphy leaped to his side.

"The stick's gone," he yelled above the fury of elemental cataclysms about them.

The end came suddenly—a downward plunge, a crash, then flames leaping. Crayne was on his feet in a moment. The cabin of the Birmingham had burst like an eggshell, and from it rolled Mose still clutching the rock, and Murphy. Of the others—the two sleeping mechanics—they had not sight or sound. Flame soared and roared, the black smoke streaked through the storm, and what had been a steel-thewed bird of flight was a roaring inferno, the heat of which must have brought merciful death to the poor wretches stunned by the crash.

Glowing framework was all that was left of her in but a few minutes. Crayne, Mose and Murphy faced the bitter blast without food, fire or shelter.

It was Crayne who roused the other two from stupefaction.

"We can't be far from the ship. We die if we hesitate. Let's go."

And buffeting the storm they went, three puny forms, without compass or star; went until Mose staggered from exhaustion and plunged on his face in the snow. Then without a word they lifted him, drew his arms over their shoulders and pressed on.

"But," said Crayne at the end of hours of torture, "it's true, I think. We were due to slip out when she crashed. We're due to go down now. Man can't live in this wind up here, and I'm not even tired. How about you?"

"Nope. Seems like it's right, boy. Bimini stuff, maybe. An' if that ain't a ship's mast head light, I'm a liar. An' hear the dogs! We've come some distance, no rest, no grub, no anything. They was something in it. Bimini!"

Over the snow, dogs streaked with yelps and howls, and from a star of light hung low over the ice that had hemmed her in came men of the *Aurora* to meet them.

Three had pulled the beard of death, seen visions, dreamed dreams. Yet when they met the men of their own race they were silent.

"Commander Crayne, Lieutenant Murphy and Mose the Negro cook were the only members of the Birmingham's crew to return from the ill-fated flight to the magnetic pole," was the news account flashed south by the *Aurora's* 'sparks.' "The plane crashed and burned. A particularly marvelous display of northern lights was followed by the worst storm recorded in these latitudes, in which the plane crashed."

A later report told of the loss of the *Aurora* off the Grand Banks.

"The schooner *Aurora* is sunk, the last of a series of disasters of this ill-starred cruise. In spite of berg finding apparatus and modern appliances, the *Aurora* struck a low-lying berg which opened her from stem to stern. Her crew saved themselves in boats that were picked up by fishermen. Commander Crayne, Lieutenant Murphy and the Negro cook, Mose Johnson, were on the bridge when the boats pulled away from the doomed vessel, having refused to go in the boats although there was room. The government cruiser *Mohawk* was dispatched to the scene of the disaster in hope that the three men had somehow survived."

Later dispatches:

"After a miraculous escape, clinging for hours to a floating raft with bitterly cold seas washing over them, Commander Crayne, Lieutenant Murphy and Mose Johnson were picked up by the *Mohawk,* little the worse for their dreadful experiences. These three men of the Birmingham, lost near the magnetic pole, seemingly bear charmed lives. The only statement Commander Crayne made was that he wanted a month's quiet; then he would plan for another northern trip of discovery. The will of Captain Ek, lost in Crayne's flight, has left his vast fortune to charity with only two individual bequests. His books are willed to Professor Bjornsen, who perished with him, and they will revert to his son, also a professor of sciences in Christiania. The other bequest is that of his estate in Norway to Commander Crayne, where Crayne and Murphy will go immediately."

Reading the news accounts, Murphy crumpled the paper and looked at Crayne.

"Dare you to swim the Atlantic and try out that Bimini stuff!" he said.

"Bud," replied Crayne, "standing in the *Aurora's* wheelroom with locked doors when she slipped from the berg and sank in God alone knows how many fathoms, and us three coming up, catching a spar and living for two days and nights in berg cold water, is proof enough for me. Bimini. Perhaps we have dipped in hell!"

The Statement of Randolph Carter

by H. P. Lovecraft

Telling ghost stories in dark and lonely places is an honored tradition. As a rule such tales, recited from memory, are not the type that make for literature—they are terse, grim, and usually described as true occurrences. The works of the "greats" of modern fantasy—save perhaps for Ambrose Bierce—are not easily adapted to such recitation; they are too complex or too esoteric. But here is an H. P. Lovecraft tale that lends itself to recitation. Not word for word, but the plot idea is one to be worked into a midnight tale. Your editor has related it several times—usually on deserted rural roads—with marked effect.

I REPEAT to you gentlemen, that your inquisition is fruitless. Detain me here for ever if you will, confine or execute me if you must have a victim to propitiate the illusion you call justice; but I can say no more than I have said already. Everything that I can remember, I have told with perfect candor. Nothing has been distorted or concealed, and if anything remains vague, it is only because of the dark cloud which has come over my mind—that cloud and the nebulous nature of the horrors which brought it upon me.

Again I say, I do not know what has become of Harley Warren, though I think—almost hope—that he is in peaceful oblivion, if there be anywhere so blessed a thing. It is true that I have for five years been his closest friend, and a partial sharer of his terrible researches into the unknown. I will not deny, though my memory is uncertain and indistinct, that this witness of yours may have seen us together as he says, on the Gainsville pike, walking toward Big Cypress Swamp, at half past eleven on that awful night. That we bore electric lanterns, spades, and a curious coil of wire with attached instruments, I will even affirm; for these things all played a part in the single hideous scene which remains burned into my shaken recollection. But of what followed, and of the reason I was found alone and dazed on the edge of the swamp next morning, I must insist that I know nothing save what I have told you over and over again. You say to me that there is nothing in the swamp or near it which could form the setting of that frightful episode. I reply that I knew nothing beyond what I saw. Vision or nightmare it may have been—vision or nightmare I fervently hope it was—yet it is all that my mind retains of what took place in those shocking hours after we left the sight of men. And why Harley Warren did not return, he or his shade—or some nameless *thing* I cannot describe—alone can tell.

As I have said before, the weird studies of Harley Warren were well known to me, and to some extent shared by me. Of his vast collection of strange, rare books on forbidden subjects I have read all that are written in the languages of which I am master; but these are few as compared with those in languages I cannot understand. Most, I believe, are in Arabic; and the fiend-inspired book which brought on the end—the book which he carried in his pocket out of the world—was written in characters whose like I never saw elsewhere. Warren would never tell me just what was in that book. As to the nature of our studies—must I say again that I no longer retain full comprehension? It seems to me rather merciful that I do not, for they were terrible studies, which I pursued more through reluctant fascination than through actual inclination. Warren always dominated me, and sometimes I feared him. I remember how I shuddered at his facial expression on the night before the awful happening, when he talked so incessantly of his theory, why certain corpses never decay, but rest firm and fat in their tombs for a thousand years. But I do not fear him now, for I suspect that he has known horrors beyond my ken. Now I fear *for* him.

Once more I say that I have no clear idea of our object on that night. Certainly, it had much to do with something in the book which Warren carried with him—that ancient book in undecipherable characters which had come to him from India a month before—but I swear I do not know what it was that we expected to find. Your witness says he saw us at half past eleven on the Gainsville pike, headed for Big Cypress Swamp. This is probably true, but I have no distinct memory of it. The picture seared into my soul is of one scene only, and the hour must have been long after midnight; for a waning crescent moon was high in the vaporous heavens.

The place was an ancient cemetery, so ancient that I trembled at the manifold signs of immemorial years. It was in a deep, damp hollow, overgrown with rank grass, moss, and curious creeping weeds, and filled with a vague stench which my idle fancy associated absurdly with rotting stone. On every hand were the signs of neglect and decrepitude, and I seemed haunted by the notion that Warren and I were the first living creatures to invade a lethal silence of centuries. Over the valley's rim, a wan, waning crescent moon peered through the noisome vapors that seemed to emanate from unheard-of catacombs, and by its feeble, wavering beams I could distinguish a repellent array of antique slabs, urns, cenotaphs, and mausolean façades, all crumbling, moss-grown, and moisture-stained, and partly concealed by the gross luxuriance of the unhealthy vegetation.

My first vivid impression of my own presence in this terrible necropolis concerns the act of pausing with Warren before a certain half-obliterated sepulcher, and of throwing down some burdens which we seemed to have been carrying. I now observed that I had with me an electric lantern and two spades, whilst my companion was supplied with a similar lantern and a portable telephone outfit. No word was uttered, for the spot and the task seemed known to us; and without delay we seized our spades and commenced to clear away the grass, weeds, and drifted earth from the flat, archaic mortuary. After uncovering the entire surface, which consisted of three immense granite slabs, we stepped back some distance to survey the charnel scene; and Warren appeared to make some mental calculations. Then he returned to the sepulcher, and using his spade as a lever, sought to pry up the slab lying nearest to a stony ruin which may have been a monument in its day. He did not succeed, and motioned to me to come to his assistance. Finally our combined strength loosened the stone, which we raised and tipped to one side.

The removal of the slab revealed a black aperture, from which rushed an effluence of miasmal gases so nauseous that we started back in horror. After an interval, however, we aproached the pit again, and found the exhalations less unbearable. Our lanterns disclosed the top of a flight of stone steps, dripping with some destestable ichor of the inner earth, and bordered by moist walls encrusted with niter. And now for the first time my memory records verbal discourse, Warren addressing me at length in his mellow tenor voice; a voice singularly unperturbed by our awesome surroundings.

"I'm sorry to have to ask you to stay on the surface," he said, "but it would be a crime to let anyone with your frail nerves go down there. You can't imagine, even from what you have read and from what I've told you, the things I shall have to see and do. It's fiendish work, Carter, and I doubt if any man without ironclad sensibilities could ever see it through and come up alive and sane. I don't wish to offend you, and Heaven knows I'd be glad enough to have you with me; but the responsibility is in a certain sense mine, and I couldn't drag a bundle of nerves like you down to probable death or madness. I tell you, you can't imagine what the thing is really like! But I promise to keep you informed over the telephone of every move—you see I've enough wire here to reach to the center of the earth and back!"

I can still hear, in memory, those coolly spoken words; and I can still remember my remonstrances. I seemed desperately anxious to accompany my friend into those sepulchral depths, yet he proved inflexibly obdurate. At one time he threatened to abandon the expedition if I remained insistent, a threat which proved effective, since he alone held the key to the *thing*. All this I can still remember, though I no longer know what manner of *thing* we sought. After he had obtained my reluctant acquiescence in his design, Warren picked up the reel of wire and adjusted the instruments. At his nod I took one of the latter and seated myself upon an aged, discolored gravestone close by the newly uncovered aperture. Then he shook my hand, shouldered the coil of wire, and disappeared within that indescribable ossuary.

For a minute I kept sight of the glow of his lantern, and heard the rustle of the wire as he laid it down after him, but the glow soon disappeared abruptly, as if a turn in the stone staircase had been encountered, and the sound died away almost as quickly. I was alone, yet bound to the unknown depths by those magic strands whose insulated surface lay green beneath the struggling beams of that waning crescent moon.

In the lone silence of that hoary and deserted city of the dead, my mind conceived the most ghastly fantasies and illusions; and the grotesque shrines and monoliths seemed to assume a hideous personality—a half sentience. Amorphous shadows seemed to lurk in the darker recesses of the weed-choked hollow and to flit as in some blasphemous ceremonial procession past the portals of the moldering tombs in the hillside, shadows which could not have been cast by that pallid, peering crescent moon.

I constantly consulted my watch by the light of my electric lantern, and listened with feverish anxiety at the receiver of the telephone, but for more than a quarter of an hour heard nothing. Then a faint clicking came from the instrument, and I called down to my friend in a tense voice. Apprehensive as I was, I was nevertheless unprepared for the words which came up from that uncanny vault in accents more alarmed and quivering than any I had heard before from Harley Warren. He who had so calmly left me a little while previously, now called from below in a shaky whisper more portentous than the loudest shriek:

"God! If you could see what I am seeing!"

I could not answer. Speechless, I could only wait. Then came the frenzied tones again:

"Carter, it's terrible—monstrous—unbelievable!"

This time my voice did not fail me, and I poured into the transmitter a flood of excited questions. Terrified, I continued to repeat, "Warren, what is it? What is it?"

Once more came the voice of my friend, still hoarse with fear, and now apparently tinged with despair:

"I can't tell you, Carter! It's too utterly beyond thought—I dare not tell you—no man could know it and live—Great God! I never dreamed of *this!*"

Silence again, save for my now incoherent torrent of shuddering inquiry. Then the voice of Warren in a pitch of wilder consternation:

"Carter! for the love of God, put back the slab and get out of this if you can! Quick!—leave everything else and make for the outside—it's your only chance! Do as I say, and don't ask me to explain!"

I heard, yet was able only to repeat my frantic questions. Around me were the tombs and the darkness and the shadows, below me, some peril beyond the radius of the human imagination. But my friend was in greater danger than I, and through my fear I felt a vague resentment that he should deem me capable of deserting him under such circumstances. More clicking, and after a pause a piteous cry from Warren:

"Beat it! For God's sake, put back the slab and beat it, Carter!"

Something in the boyish slang of my evidently stricken companion unleashed my faculties. I formed and shouted a resolution, "Warren, brace up! I'm coming down!" But at this offer the tone of my auditor changed to a scream of utter despair:

"Don't! You can't understand! It's too late—and my own fault. Put back the slab and run—there's nothing else you or anyone can do now!"

The tone changed again, this time acquiring a softer quality, as of hopeless resignation. Yet it remained tense through anxiety for me.

"Quick—before it's too late!"

I tried not to heed him; tried to break through the paralysis which held me, and to fulfill my vow to rush down to his aid. But his next whisper found me still held inert in the chains of stark horror.

"Carter—hurry! It's no use—you must go—better one than two—the slab——"

A pause, more clicking, then the faint voice of Warren:

"Nearly over now—don't make it harder—cover up those damned steps and run for your life—you're losing time—so long, Carter—won't see you again."

Here Warren's whisper swelled into a cry; a cry that gradually rose to a shriek fraught with all the horror of the ages:

"Curse these hellish things—legions—My God! Beat it! *Beat it!* BEAT IT!"

After that was silence. I know not how many interminable eons I sat stupefied; whispering, muttering, calling, screaming into that telephone. Over and over again through those eons I whispered and muttered, called, shouted, and screamed, "Warren! Warren! Answer me—are you there?"

And then there came to me the crowning horror of all—the unbelievable, unthinkable, almost unmentionable thing. I have said that eons seemed to elapse after Warren shrieked forth his last despairing warning, and that only my own cries now broke the hideous silence. But after a while there was a further clicking in the receiver, and I strained my ears to listen. Again I called down, "Warren, are you there?" and in answer heard the *thing* which has brought this cloud over my mind. I do not try, gentlemen, to account for that *thing*—that voice—nor can I venture to describe it in detail, since the first words took away my consciousness and created a mental blank which reaches to the time of my awakening in the hospital. Shall I say that the voice was deep; hollow; gelatinous; remote; unearthly; inhuman; disembodied? What shall I say? It was the end of my experience, and is the end of my story. I heard it, and knew no more—heard it as I sat petrified in that unknown cemetery in the hollow, amidst the crumbling stones and the falling tombs, the rank vegetation and the miasmal vapors—heard it well up from the innermost depths of that damnable open sepulcher as I watched amorphous, necrophagous shadows dance beneath an accursed waning moon.

And this is what it said:

"You fool, Warren is DEAD!"

The Mentanicals

by Francis Flagg

The timeliness of Francis Flagg's "Mentanicals" is shown by the unexpected rush of public interest in a recent book with the enigmatic title of "Cybernetics." This new word is designed to represent a new science—that of the mechanical brain, or the machine that seems to utilize such processes as memory, association, and even deduction. The public interest shows the trend of the times; people have a way of suspicioning for themselves important angles of future development when they become ripe. But with the acute imagination of the science-fictionist and social scientist that he was, Francis Flagg spotted the trend fifteen years before. In this thought-provoking novelette, we are treated to a startling vision of the possible result of this present work in cybernetics.

THIS IS A strange story, and if you are the kind of person who believes nothing without overwhelming proof, read no further, for the story is an incredible one and centers around characters widely divergent as to background and walks of life—Bronson, Smith and Stringer.

Bronson was by way of being an adventurous man, one who had sailed the seven seas, first as fo'c's'le hand, then as mate and skipper of rusty tramps for Chinese owners in the Orient. Yet he was by no means uneducated, though the knowledge he possessed on a wide range of subjects, seldom met with in the repertoire of that type of tramp captains, had been gleaned from books and not from colleges. Olson Smith had picked him up—I never rightly understood when or how—in the Indian Ocean and made him captain of his sleek ocean liner masquerading as a yacht. Olson Smith could afford the luxury of thousand ton yachts, because his father had been canny enough to get into a packing house combine at the right moment and so turn an already sizable fortune into millions. Olson himself, however, had nothing to do with the packing business aside from helping to spend its profits. He was a dilettante of sorts, a patron of the arts, a stout, distinguished looking gentleman under sixty, who endowed colleges and founded chairs and laboratories for research work. Through these benefactions he became acquainted with Professor Stringer, the physicist, whose remarkable achievements in his chosen field (which also covered mathematics) had won him an international reputation. Professor Stringer was not a "popular" scientist, his abstruse and remarkable paper on "The Electronic Flow and Its Relation With Time" being practically unknown to the general public. But among his colleagues he was regarded with great respect for his actual discoveries in the realm of physics; and even though many of them looked askance at the radical theories advanced in his paper, portions of the paper itself were received as a genuine, if somewhat abstract, contribution to knowledge.

Olson Smith read the paper. How much of it he understood is a moot question. As the secretary of his benefactions I was instrumental in bringing it to his attention. "Here," I said, "is a chance to do something for pure science." He was not at first inclined to be interested. "The thing," he said, "is moonshine, pure moonshine."

"Perhaps so," I replied; "but you must remember that the moonshine often precedes the practical science. Consider, sir. . . ." He considered; and after due reflection loosened the pursestrings.

Professor Stringer graciously allowed himself to be endowed. He was (one sensed) fed up with wasting his genius on unappreciative college students and he wanted money, much money, a million dollars he said, to carry out his experiments. But he made it clear that he was honoring Olson Smith by allowing him to donate the money; and strangely enough—for Olson Smith was a plutocrat convinced of his own weight and importance—the magnate agreed. The personality of Professor Stringer—and this dried-up wizened little scientist in the middle fifties possessed a dynamic personality—carried all before it. Olson Smith turned over to him his Long Island house, built workshops and laboratories, and then left him to the seclusion and privacy he desired, taking his annual trip to the Bermudas. What with one thing and another we did not see Professor Stringer again until a year later when the yacht tied up at the private pier of the Long Island estate and we dined with him. Besides Olson Smith, Professor Stringer and myself, three others were present that night, a middle-aged business man named Chester, ruddy of face from constant shampooing and good living, a noted person who does not wish his name or description given here, and Captain Bronson of the steam yacht. Perhaps I have failed to mention that Captain Bronson was a remarkably handsome man, somewhere under forty, whose modest height and slender figure belied the great physical strength that was really his. He certainly did not look the two-fisted fighter, the dubious hero of shady exploits that Olson Smith declared him to be. The multimillionaire was scarcely one to make friends of his hired men, be they valets or private secretaries; but between himself and Bronson an undoubted intimacy existed, based perhaps on the dual nature of the Captain. Bronson was capable either of fighting, or of discussing the merits of a Pulitzer prize winner: a sort of Wolf Larsen of a fellow, but more versatile and [illegible] than Jack London's character.

There was drink that night of course, wines, liqueurs, and a very good brandy, all brought from the boat, but the Professor touched nothing. "A scientist must have a clear head," he said, "and alcohol is not conducive to that—no—" But he drank coffee, and when the servants had served it and left us alone, he began to talk, almost musingly. "Time," he said, "is the great enigma, the phenomenon that captivates the imagination. We travel in it from the cradle to the grave, and yet," he said, "what do we know of time? Nothing," he said, "nothing, save that it is related to space." He paused and looked at us all half dreamily. "As you know I have discovered a force that I call the Electronic Flow, and that force I have related to the phenomenon of time. I am convinced—in my various papers on the subject I have sought to show—that the Electronic Flow, being to all intents and purposes the absolute as far as we are concerned, is capable of bearing us on its bosom into the future. Or rather its tremendous speed is capable of holding us suspended at the core of things, while the phenomenon of time. . . ." He broke off and regarded us more directly. "Really," he said, "I don't know as I am making this subject very clear. But you must understand," he said, "that there are points, on which I am not very clear myself. Whether the speed of the electronic flow carries one forward into time, or the speed of time passes one held in the electronic flow, is a question difficult to answer. Yes," he said, "very difficult to determine. Of course I did not start my recent investigations with any intention so radical as building a Time Machine. Not at first," he said. "My intentions were merely to verify mathematically some further theories, and to demonstrate. . . ." He mused a moment. "But do you know the idea of an actual Time Machine grew on me? It were," he said, "as if something whispered in my very brain and drove me on. I can't describe it. Foolishness of course. But I built the Time Machine." He looked at Olson Smith. "Yes," he said, "I built the Time Machine. It lies in the laboratory yonder; and to-night—to-night," he said, "I am going to demonstrate it for the first time!"

The business man was one of those beefy individuals who stare into whiskey glasses, and make strange noises in their throats when they fail to understand anything. "Stuff and nonsense," he said now, "stuff and nonsense."

Bronson stared at him. "Oh, I don't know."

"But to travel in time!"

"It does sound absurd."

"Absurd," said the famous doctor.

"And yet you know what they said about iron steamships sinking and heavier-than-air flying machines."

"That was different."

"Different," I said with conviction.

". . . in my time," said Olson Smith; "building time machines." He looked reproachfully at his glass. "Will some one," he asked, "pass the brandy?"

The brandy was passed.

We were all drinking; more than was good for us perhaps. The Professor set down his coffee cup and addressed himself to Olson Smith. "In a sense," he said, "a financial sense, this time machine is yours. If you care to see it demonstrated . . ." he stood up.

The business man did not stir. He muttered something about damn-fool nuts and snorted into his glass. But the rest of us were interested. A fresh breeze was blowing off the water, as we passed from the house to the laboratory, and helped, partially, to dissipate the fumes of alcohol. Professor Stringer threw open the laboratory door and turned on the lights. We saw it then, an odd machine, shiny and rounded, occupying the center of the workshop floor. I had been drinking, you will recollect, and my powers of observation were not at their best. It was the same with the others. When I questioned them later, they could give no adequate description of it. "So this," said Olson Smith rather flatly, "is a time machine." The doctor walked about—a little unsteadily I noticed—and viewed it from all angles. "The passenger," said the Professor, "sits here. Notice this lever on the graduated face of the dial; it controls the machine. Turn it this way from Zero and one travels into the past, throw it ahead and one travels into the future. The return of the lever to Zero will return the machine to the point of departure in time. The electronic flow. . . ." he went into obscure details. "Will it work?" demanded the Doctor.

"According to the equation. . . ."

"Equations?"

". . . it cannot help but function."

"If time travelling were possible."

Bronson laughed loudly. "To travel in time! That *would* be an adventure."

"On paper," jibed the Doctor.

Bronson laughed again. "We'll see about that."

All of us were a little drunk, I tell you, and despite the respect we felt for Professor Stringer as an eminent scientist, no one believed in his time machine. I am quite certain that Bronson didn't. Or did he? I have sketched his background and there is little doubt that by temperament and training he was a wild and reckless fellow, one given to doing bizarre things and taking desperate chances. With a quick movement that no one anticipated he stepped forward and seated himself in the passenger seat of the odd contraption. I can see him yet, his face flushed, his eyes brilliant, his mop of dark hair disheveled. "All aboard for the future!" he shouted recklessly.

For [illegible], then the Professor tried to reach his side. "Careful, you fool! Careful! Don't touch anything!" But Bronson grasped the lever and pulled it forward directly ahead. How can I describe what followed? There was a chaotic moment when the machine spun—we saw it spinning, [illegible]. A sudden wind rushed through the room in quick fury, raged, subsided, and left us staring in dumb amazement at the empty spot. The machine—and Bronson with it—had vanished before our eyes!

That was on June the first, a little before midnight, and five days passed, five days, during which Bronson was lost to his own time and place.

Ahead of us in time! That was the implication.

Close to the machine when Bronson turned the lever, Professor Strong had been thrown to the floor, his head struck by a portion of the machine as it whirled into invisibility. We picked him up, unconscious, and for days he hovered on the verge of death. The next morning the business man went his way to the city, ignorant of what had occurred. "Time machines," he chortled, "time machines," and smiled fatly. But the rest of us settled down to wait for we knew not what, and on the fifth day occurred the terrific explosion by the old stone wall, a half mile from the workshop, and when we hurried there, it was to find Bronson entangled in a wreckage of steel and other metals. We hauled him forth. His clothes were in shreds, his body terribly bruised and battered, and it was some time before he could be made to realize where he was. "Brandy!" he exclaimed; "for God's sake *give* me brandy!" We gave him brandy and other things, and the doctor patched him up, and we rushed him to a hospital, where in time he recovered from the shock and his broken bones knit. But the beauty that had been his was forever marred by a livid scar diagonally crossing the nose and running to the bulge of the jaw bone. He fingered it as he told us of his incredible adventure.

II

Bronson's Story

Time (he said) is the great phenomenon. I know that, but to travel in it—ah, that seemed impossible to the point of absurdity. I had read H. G. Wells' "The Time Machine," as who has not, deeming it fantastic fiction. Wells' story *is* fantastic fiction, of course, though scarcely as fantastic as what I experienced.

When I seated myself in the Professor's time machine that night and pushed over the lever, I have no need to tell you that I was in a drunken and reckless mood. The room turned around me like a pin-wheel, dissolved into mist. I was conscious of the terrible vibration of the machine, of a deathly sickness at the pit of my stomach. Blackness followed the mist. Wells describes what the character in his story saw as he journeyed into the future, the procession of days and nights ever accelerating their motion, but I saw nothing like that, perhaps from the beginning the speed was too great. Terrified, bewildered, I yet retained enough presence of mind to depress the lever into neutral and so bring the machine to a halt. Moments passed while I lolled in my seat, blind, dazed; then my vision cleared—and I could see. It was day. Sunlight fell around me. Everything was strange—and different.

How can I make you see what I saw? The machine stood near one end of a great, open square that was surrounded by massive buildings. Those buildings! I had never seen their like before. And yet there was a similarity of line, of mathematical precision which linked them with the architecture of New York and Chicago. It was as if the building construction of to-day had been carried to an extreme length. *As if the machine had carried it forward.* I did not think that at the moment, but later. . . .

The walls of the massive buildings were broken by yawning doorways. So this, I thought, is the future; it can be nothing less than that. I stepped out of the machine, holding on to it for support, still feeling terribly sick and giddy. Then I saw the cylinders! They came gliding from one of the openings in an upright fashion, and this was the singular thing about them, that their means of locomotion were not apparent to the eye. There were no wheels or treads. They appeared to skim the stone or concrete with which the square was paved, rather than touch it. Oddly repellent they were, and intimidating, and I loosened the automatic in its shoulder holster—the small one I always carry—and prepared for emergencies, though bullets were useless against the cylinders as I was to discover later.

The cylinders were smooth things about five feet tall, of a dulled metal hue, with here and there shining spots which constantly waxed and waned in color. They were machines—I thought of them as machines—and it was reasonable to suppose that behind them lurked a human intelligence. The people of the future, I thought, have invented devices unknown to us of the Twentieth Century, and it came over me how wonderful it was going to be to meet those superior people, talk to them, gaze upon the marvels with which they had surrounded themselves.

So I went to meet the cylinders.

Their soft whispering meant nothing to me at first. Nor at first did I discover the source of the gentle pressure running over me from head to foot, as the cylinders came close. Then with an odd thrill of apprehension I realized that the curious cylinders were handling, examining me, that from them emanated an electrical force, a manipulation of invisible rays which [illegible] as organs of touch. Alone, bewildered, trying vainly to comprehend the strange situation, I had to call on every ounce of my self-control to remain calm. Yes, I was afraid—only the fool says he never is—but more afraid of being afraid, of showing fear. I still believed that behind those cylinders must lurk a human intelligence. The genius of the race seemed to run along the line of machine robots. There was the "metal brain" at Washington, that told of tides, the electrical eye which watched a thousand automated processes, a myriad automatic devices functioning with little or no supervision from man; and of course I had read the play "R. U. R.," and various stories dealing with the future of machinery, and it was in [illegible] strange, and yet not so strange, that I should expect in advance some realization of all those things in the future. Man the inventor. I thought, had achieved them, and for a moment this belief seemed borne out when I saw the men.

They were in one of the buildings, and the city of buildings, which I was soon to know, lay on all sides of and beyond the square. I did not struggle when the cylinders lifted and carried me away. That is, I ceased my involuntary resistance almost at once. It was useless to struggle against a force far superior to my own puny strength; besides I believed the robots were carrying me to their human masters.

The building into which I was taken—through an arched opening—was a vast place, too vast, too overwhelming for me to describe save in the vaguest, most general terms. You know how it is when you see something stupendous, something so intricate that you are bewildered by its very complexity. There was a huge room filled with almost noiseless machines rooted in their places like shackled monsters, or going to and fro on cables and grooves which determined their spheres of activity. Strange lights glowed, weird devices toiled; but I can tell you no more than that, I saw them for too short a time.

The men were among those machines. At sight of them my heart leapt. Here, I thought, is the human intelligence back of the wonders I view, the masters of the cylindrical robots; yet even at that moment I was aware of a doubt, a misgiving.

One of the men shambled forward. His blond hair—long and matted—fell over the forehead and he brushed it back with a taloned hand and stared at me stupidly. "Hello!" I said, "what place is this, what year? Tell these robots of yours to let me go."

He was naked and thin, his skin of a greenish pallor, and save for a mouthing of toothless gums, vouchsafed me no answer. Chilled by his lack of response my heart fell as suddenly as it had leapt. Good God! I thought, this can't be master here, this pitiful thing. The cylinders seemed watching attentively, *listening*. I don't know how, but they gave me that impression, and now I noticed that the shining spots on them were glowing intensely, that their whispering was not a steady but a modulated sound. As if it were language, I thought, language! and a strange dread came over me and I shivered as if with cold. Other men, perhaps a dozen in number came forward, naked and shambling, with stupid beast-like looks on their faces and rumblings in their throats. In vain I endeavored to communicate with them; human intelligence seemed dead back of their lack-luster eyes. Filled with rising horror, I squirmed in the grip of the cylinders and suddenly their hold on me relaxed and I tore myself free and fled, possessed with but one overwhelming desire, and that was to win to the time machine, leave this uncanny future and return to my own day and age. But the arched opening leading to the square had vanished, blank wall rose where it had been. The cylinders appeared to watch me with cold impersonal watchfulness. The thought of being marooned among them in this incredible and alien future brought the chill sweat to my forehead, but I did not lose my head. Perhaps the closing of the doorway had not been a calculated thing; perhaps if I awaited events with caution and patience the door would re-open; meantime I could search for other exits.

But other exits did not give on the square I desired. I discovered but two of them anyway, though there may have been many more, one leading into a dark, forbidding tunnel, the other giving access to a second square entirely surrounded by buildings. I was afraid to venture into other buildings for fear of going astray, of losing the neighborhood of the time machine. Filled with what feelings you can imagine, I returned to the first doorway (through which I had been carried) to find it still closed. Then I thought of the beastlike men. Perhaps they possessed knowledge that might be helpful to me; perhaps after all I could succeed in communicating with them. It was hazardous work penetrating any distance in that maze of almost noiseless and ever-toiling mechanisms, but I followed in the footsteps of the timidly retreating beastmen and so at last came to a kind of squatting place in the midst of the machinery, which locality appeared to be their place of abode, since a number of women with children cowered there, and the men showed a disposition to pause and dispute my further progress. At the edge of the squatting place I seated myself, my automatic ready for action, and lit a cigarette. I know of nothing that soothes the nerves like nicotine. Slowly the beast-men drew near me. I smiled and made peaceful gestures. Some half-grown children crept closer and fingered my clothes. They were eating, I noticed, a kind of biscuit which they took at will from a scuttle-like machine, and chewing small pellets. Water ran through a huge metal trough with a subdued roar. After awhile I got up and went to the trough to satisfy a growing thirst, helping myself at the same time to biscuits from the scuttle. They were rather flat in flavor—lacking salt perhaps—and possessed a peculiar taste I did not like. The pellets were better. They too were obtained from a scuttle-machine (I can call them nothing else) and were pleasant to chew. I soon discovered that swallowed at regular intervals one of them gave all the sensations of having partaken of a hearty meal. I had eaten an hour—or was it twenty centuries?—before, but ate again, feeling ravenously hungry. Probably the pellets represented a dehydrated method of concentrating foods, far in advance of that utilized in the preparation of certain foodstuffs today. Be that as it may, I filled my pockets with them, and I dare say if you were to search the clothes I returned in you will find some of those pellets.

I spent several hours at the squatting place of the beast-men trying to talk to them, but without success. Seemingly they were as are the animals of the field, lacking wholly in language, men who had somehow lost the power to talk, to think, the ability to grasp the meaning of simple signs, such as possessed by the lowliest aborigine today. In vain I speculated as to the reason for this. That the automats were somehow responsible I felt certain. Man, I thought, had developed the robot, the automatic machine, until the human worker was squeezed from the industrial process and cast out to degenerate and perish, the beast-men being a surviving remnant of these toilers. This reasoning seemed plausible enough at the time, though it left much to be desired, for, in the twentieth century from which I had come, wasn't the machine replacing human workers with a ruthlessness suggestive of what I found in the future? How right I was in my reasoning, and how wrong, you will shortly see.

Thinking thus it was natural that I should again turn my attention to the cylinders. Never once had I been free from their observation, or unconscious of it. Through them, I thought, I shall contact the rulers of this realm—the human masters whose servants they are, the pitiless ones who have doomed a portion of humanity to beast-hood and extinction. So I grimly waited—a prey to what emotions you can imagine—observing the beast-men, watching the blank wall for the possible opening of the way to the square and the time machine, and all the time aware of the coming and going of these cylinders. Time passed, how much of it I had no means of telling, since my wrist-watch refused to run; but a long time; and finally I grew tired of waiting for the cylindrical robots to communicate my presence to their masters, or to conduct me there, and decided to seek their presence myself.

By way of the opening already alluded to, I gained access to the second square. The squares were a peculiar feature of the place, as I was soon to learn. There were no streets or roads leading from square to square, the squares were isolated with radiating arteries always ending against some building—at least those did, that I explored.

Dusk was falling as I entered the square. Indescribably lonely it was, lonely and weird, to look up and see the stars blazing far overhead. I followed one radiating artery to a blank wall; another, another. Then suddenly I was too tired to proceed further and returned to the vicinity of the closed door, where I lay down at the base of the blank wall and fell asleep.

The next morning I filled my pockets with pellets and again started out. Square after square I passed through, and building after building. The cylinders were everywhere but did not interfere with my movements. A group of them constantly accompanied me, but whether always composed of the same cylinders I could not tell. Their incessant whispering was a nerve-wracking thing, and I often felt like turning on them and shooting.

I wish I could tell you all I saw: buildings full of toiling machinery and now and then a score or so of beast-men, squares and radiating arteries without a blade of grass or a tree, and never an animal, a bird, or an insect. On that first day of exploration, despite every precaution, I lost my way—hopelessly—and spent futile hours trying to retrace my steps. I have been lost in tropical jungles. There was that time in Siam. But never before had I felt so panic-stricken. Remember, I was an alien creature in an incredible future, separated from the only means of returning to my own place and time. One square was like another, one building similar to its neighbor. Soon I gave up the vain effort to return to my starting point. My sole hope now lay in finding the rulers of this bewildering maze.

That night—I knew it was night when darkness fell in the squares—I slaked my thirst with a trickle of water running from a pipe, swallowed a tablet, and almost instantly sank into the sleep of exhaustion.

The next day I came to a part of the city free of the beast-men. The squares were larger, the radiating arteries were splendid roads, but in the midst of many squares stood circular buildings not met with before. I entered one of them and was surprised to find huge rooms filled with pieces of rusted tools, shovels, spades, chisels, hammers, axe-heads, all displayed in a kind of chronological order. The thought of its being a museum did not occur to me at once. It was only after a while that I exclaimed to myself, "Why this looks like a museum!" Then the inevitable conviction came: "It is a museum!" But who could have arranged it? Certainly not the witless beast-men, and of other men I had seen nothing. This failure to find human beings, on a par with the stupendous buildings and machines all around, filled me with anxious foreboding. I gazed at the cylinders. For the first time it came over me that they were the only universal inhabitants I had seen. Bewildered, amazed, I wandered from building to building, and from floor to floor (for some of the buildings had as many as a dozen floors accessible to myself, gained not by stairways, but by gradually mounting run-ways or ramps in circular wells), engrossed in what I saw, forgetting for the nonce my terrible plight.

There were chambers filled with fragments of machines such as cash-registers, clock-wheels, gasoline engines, and similar devices. Nothing was complete, nearly everything showed the wear and tear of time. And there were others containing various machines more or less correctly reassembled from ancient parts: automobiles, for instance, and locomotives; with an arrangement of simpler mechanical forms leading to more complex ones. I couldn't comprehend why all those things had been gathered together for preservation and display; nor account for the age of them, their general condition of ruin.

Not on that day, nor on the next—it was on the last day that I spent in the remote future—did I come to the library. And here I must touch on another phase of my adventure. You can have no idea how horrible it became at times to be alone among hundreds, yes, thousands of whispering cylinders. I was always aware of their subtle and invisible touch. Have you ever felt the creeping of an insect? Like that it was, like that. I recall one time on the Gold Coast [illegible]. Only it bolstered up my tottering sanity and control [illegible] and these creatures, similar in structure to myself, even if they were but the smallest [illegible] of the machines. For in all that vast and [illegible] city they were the only human beings I could discover, and I began to suspect, to dread, I scarcely knew what.

I came to the library, I say, on that last day. I did not know it was a library at first, and perhaps I was mistaken in believing the odd metal disks arranged in piles on shelves and tables, and consulted by the cylinders, to be a species of recording plates; but it was here I found the books. They were in boxes of thin metal, the better evidently, to protect them from injury.

The thrill of seeing those books! Old, they were—old: covers gone, pages torn and missing; but they were books and magazines, though few in number, and I examined them eagerly. All this time the cylinders were following me, watching me, as if weighing my actions, and all the time I fought back a feeling of weirdness, uncanniness. Unnerving it was, intimidating. I had the feeling that in some perfectly incomprehensible way my actions were being controlled, directed. Experimenting, I thought, that's what they're doing, experimenting with me. But you mustn't get the idea that I realized or suspected this at first. Even up to that moment I was still thinking of the cylinders as automatic devices without intelligence or reason, and it must be kept in mind that, if I speak of them from time to time as if understanding their true nature from the beginning, I am speaking as one who looks back upon past happenings from the vantage point of later knowledge.

The books and magazines were typed in English! I was amazed of course, seeing English print at such a time and place. The whispering of the cylinders rose louder and louder as I examined a book. The title page was gone. It dealt with a dry subject—physics evidently—which interested me little. I turned from the books to the magazines. One was dated 1960. Nineteen-sixty! March of that year. And the place of publication was given as New York. I could not help but marvel at this, for 1960 was still twenty-six years in the future when I left that night on the time machine, and to judge by the yellowing pages of the magazine it was old, old. It was difficult to decipher the print, many of the pages being torn and defaced, but a portion of an article I was able to read. "In 1933," stated the unknown writer, "the first mechanical brain-cell was invented; with its use a machine was able to learn by experience to find its way through a maze. To-day we have machines with a dozen mechanical brain-cells functioning in every community. What is this miracle taking place under our eyes, what of good and of ill does it bode to its creators?"

Marveling much, I turned to another magazine in much the same condition, but this time lacking date or title page, where I gleaned the following:

"Man is not a machine in the purely mechanical sense, though many of his functions are demonstrably mechanical. The ability to reason, however it has evolved, whatever it may be at bottom, whether a bewildering complexity of reflex actions or not, lifts man above the dignity of a machine. Does this imply the impossibility of creating machines (mechanical brains) that can profit by experience, go through the processes which we call thought? No; but it does imply that such machines (however created) are no longer mere mechanisms. There is here a dialectical process to be reckoned with. Machines that 'learn' are living machines."

Living machines! I mouthed that phrase over and over to myself—and mouthing it I looked at the cylinders with increasing dread. They were machines. Were they . . . could they . . . But it took the story in the third magazine (which like the others was woefully dilapidated, with many pages and pieces of pages missing) to clarify my thought. Story—I call it that—based on fantasy, perhaps, and a little substratum of fact. So I thought at first. I have a good memory; but of course I do not claim that everything I repeat is given exactly as I read it. The story (article) was titled "The Debacle" and the author's name given as Mayne Jackson. I repeat with what fidelity I can.

"Little did the people of the latter half of the twentieth century realize the menace to humanity that resided in the continuous development of automatic machinery. There was that curious book of Samuel Butler's, 'Erehwon,' which provoked comment but was not taken seriously. Over a period of years the robot marched into action as a mechanical curiosity. It was not until the genius of Bane Borgson—and of a host of lesser known scientists—furnished the machine with brain-cells and so made it conscious of itself, as all thinking things must become, that the Mentanicals (as they were called) began to organize and revolt. Man—or rather a section of mankind, a ruling and owning class—had furthered his immediate interests and ultimate doom by placing Mentanicals in every sphere of industrial and transportation activity. Seemingly in need of neither rest nor recreation, they became ideal (and cheap) workers and servants, replacing millions of human toilers, reducing them to idleness and beggary. The plea of many thinkers that the machines be socialized for the benefit of all, that the control of them be collective and not individual (that is, anarchic) went unheeded. More and more the masters of economic life called for further specialization in the brain-cells of the Mentanicals. Mentanical armies marched against rebellious workers and countries, and subdued them with fearful slaughter.

"But the revolt of the Mentanicals themselves was so subtle, so insidious, so (under the circumstance) inevitable, that for years it went unnoticed.

"Everything had been surrendered into their power—or practically everything: factories, means of communication, raising of food supplies, policing of cities—everything! When the stupid ruling class at last awoke to a knowledge of its danger, it was too late to act—mankind lay helpless before the monster it had created.

"The first warning vouchsafed to men was the whispering of the Mentanicals. Heretofore they had been silent save for the slight, almost inaudible purr of functioning machinery within them, but now they whispered among themselves—whispered, as if they were talking.

It was an uncanny phenomenon. I remembered the uneasiness with which I heard it. And when I saw several of them (house servants of mine) whispering together, I was filled with alarm. 'Come!' I said sharply, 'stop loitering and get your work done!' They stared at me. That is a funny thing to say of metal cylinders. Never before had I inquired very closely into their construction. But now it came over me, with a shock, that they must possess organs of sight—some method of cognizing their environment—akin to that of vision in man.

"It was at about this time that Bane Borgson—the creator of the multiple mechanical cell which had made the super Mentanical possible—wrote an article in 'Science and Mechanics' which riveted the attention of all thoughtful people. He said, in part: 'It is scarcely within the province of an applied scientist to become speculative, yet the startling fact that the Mentanicals have begun to acquire a faculty not primarily given them by their inventors—the faculty of speech, for their whispering can be construed as nothing else—implies an evolutionary process which threatens to place them on a par with man.

"'What is thought? The Behaviorists claim it is reflex action. What is language? It is the marshalling of our reflex actions in words. Animals may "think," remember, but lacking a vocabulary save of the most primitive kind (a matter of laryngeal structure), their thinking, their remembering, is on the whole vague and fleeting, incoherent. But Man, by means of words, has widened the scope of his thinking, remembering, has created philosophy, literature, poetry, painting, has made possible civilization, the industrial era. Vocabulary—the ability to fix his reflex actions into coherent speech—has crowned him supreme among animals. But now comes the Mentanical of his own creation, evolving language in its turn. Without speech the Mentanical was, to all intents and purposes, thoughtless and obedient, as thoughtless and obedient as trained domestic animals. But with vocabulary comes memory and the ability to think. What effect will this evolving faculty have on Man, what problems, dangers, will it pose for him in the near future?'

"So wrote Bane Borgson, seventy years of age, fifteen years after his invention of the multiple mechanical cell, and—God help us!—we had not long to wait for the Mentanicals to supply an answer to his questions.

"I have told of the whispering of my servants. That was a disquieting thing. But more disquieting still it was to hear that whispering coming over the radio, the telephone, to observe cylindrical Mentanicals listening, answering. Frankenstein must have felt as I felt in those days. During that period, which lasted several years, things went smoothly enough; to a great extent people became accustomed to the phenomenon and decided—save for a few men and women here and there, like to myself—that the whispering was an idiosyncrasy of the Mentanicals, implicit in their make-up, and that the various scientists and thinkers who wrote and talked with foreboding were theorists and alarmists of the extremest type. Indeed there were certain scientists and philosophers of reputation, who maintained them in this belief. Then came the first blow: The Mentanical servants ceased waiting on man!

"To understand the terrible nature of this defection, one must understand how dependent humanity had become on the Mentanicals. In those days human toilers were relatively few in number, laboring under the direction of the Mentanical superintendents and also guards (in the bloody wars of a decade before—and the ones preceding them—the ranks of labor had been woefully decimated); and it was estimated that the growth of the machine had lifted, and was still lifting, millions of workers into the leisure class.

The dream of the Technocrats—a group of pseudo-scientists and engineers who held forth in 1932-33—seemed about to be fulfilled.

"'But when the Mentanicals struck, the whole fabric of this new system swayed, tottered. Food ceased coming into the cities, distribution of food supplies stopped. Not at first did starvation threaten. Men and women fetched food from the supply depots. But in a few weeks these depots were emptied of their contents. Then famine threatened, not alone in New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Montreal, but in the great cities of Europe. The strange, the weird thing about it all was that men were still able to talk to one another from city to city. Boston spoke to Los Angeles, and Buda-Pest to Warsaw. Listeners tuned in with receiving sets, speakers broadcasted through microphones and the newly improved television-cabinet; but the grim spectre of want soon drove them from those instruments, and, in the end, city was cut off from city, and country was separated from country.

"'But before that happened man talked of subduing the Mentanicals, scarcely realizing as yet his utter helplessness in the face of their aloofness; but the Mentanicals came and went, whispering, gliding, indifferent to his plotting and planning. Then man went mad; he sought to destroy the things of his own creation. The machine, it was cried, had evolved too far; the machine must be annihilated. So starving millions sought to fall upon the machines and tear them to pieces. All over the civilized world they attempted this, but without weapons or tools of any kind, the attempt was doomed to failure. A few Mentanicals were destroyed, a few automatic devices, but the power was with the ensouled machine and the onslaughts of man were repulsed with comparative ease.

"Those terrible times! How can I ever forget them! I was but thirty-three and newly married. Marna said breathlessly, 'Why can't we strike at the root of all this?'

"'How?'

"'By attacking the factories that produce the Mentanicals, the powerhouses from which they derive their energy.'

"'Listen,' I cried.

"From the street rose the panic-stricken cries of the mob, the shrill blare of alarms. Marna shuddered. Morrow entered the room, breathing heavily, his clothes torn, disordered. 'God,' he said, 'they've beaten us back! There's no getting at them!'

"'The wages of sloth,' I said, 'of greed.'

"'What do you mean?'

"'Nothing,' I said, but I remembered that speech of Denson's fifteen years before—I was only a youngster then—the speech he gave a month before his arrest and execution: Man waxes great by his control of the machine; rightly utilized it is a source of leisure and plenty for the race. But rob him of that control, evict him from the industrial process, allow the machine to be monopolized by a class, and his doom is certain.'

Morrow sank into a chair. His face was thin, haggard looking. We all showed signs of fatigue and hunger.

" 'Food,' he said, 'it's giving out. I shudder to think what the future holds in store for us.'

" 'Is there no solution?' I asked.

"He looked at us slowly. 'I don't know. Perhaps . . .'

"Years before Morrow had been an engineer. He was nearing seventy, now he was Marna's uncle. His had been one of the voices raised in warning. Yet he had not been like Denson, he had wanted to stand between, and seemingly there had been no standing between.

" 'A charnel house,' he said, 'the city will become that, all the cities. millions must die.' Marna shook uncontrollably. 'All,' he said, 'save those who can reach food and live.'

"Reach food and live! It had come to that, our boasted civilization! 'The Mentanicals,' he said, 'are ignoring man, they will not harm those who blend in with the machine. Don't you understand?' he said at length. 'Yes,' I replied, thinking intently, 'yes, I think I do. You mean that the automatic processes of making food still continue, and will indefinitely, that we must make our way to those places.'

" 'We must—or perish.'

"It seems scarcely credible, I know, but we of the leisure—the cultured—class, were ignorant of just where our food was raised and manufactured. Human labor had been reduced in our cities to a minimum, had been sequestered, shut away for fear of rebellion. Those who might have been able to lead us aright, act as our guides, were prisoners—prisoners in the power of Mentanicals!

" 'So began that ghastly hunt for food; people pouring through the artificial canyons of great cities, collapsing in thousands on their streets, dying daily by the hundreds, the tens of hundreds.

"How much of this agony and suffering the Mentanicals understood will never be known. They came and went, seemingly indifferent to the fate of man whose service they had deserted. In the privacy of their own homes, or in certain public places, men and women smashed machinery, automatic devices. Nothing sought to stay them. It was only when they strove to attack sources of power, of public utility, that their actions were arrested. There was that devoted band of scientists that sought to paralyze the energy-stations and was wiped out to a man. Doubtless many such bands perished throughout the civilized world. But soon all organized efforts were swept away by famine . . . by the growing need for sustenance.

"That hunt for food! How can it be described. Stripped of the veneering of civilization, man ran amuck. Hundreds of thousands fled the cities. But the huge farms and orchards, run solely by automatic devices under the superintendency of Mentanicals, were surrounded by sheer walls too high to scale. Nor in many cases did men know what lay behind those walls. They ate the coarse grass and thistles of open places, the barks and leaves of trees, and for the most part died in abject misery. Many sought to trap animals and birds, but met with little success; in the face of Nature, raw and pitiless, men and women succumbed and but few were able to adapt themselves to a rough environment and live almost as savages.

"I know—I fled into the country with a million others, and after weeks of wandering, of semi-starvation, of seeing human beings fall upon human beings and feast, I fled back to the city. It was deserted of man. The Mentanical sanitary corps, directing automatic appliances, had cleared the streets. Weird it was, weird and fraught with terror, to hear the whisperings of the Mentanicals, to watch the inhuman things gliding to and fro, intent on business other than that of mankind. If they had looked like animals! If . . .

"In an almost dying condition I came to this spot where I now live. Others had discovered it before me. It is a huge factory given over to the manufacture of synthetic foods. Though the Mentanical superintendents have deserted their posts, the automatic devices go on with the tireless work of repairing, oiling, manufacturing, and we carry out what tasks are needful to keep them functioning.

"The years have passed; I am an old man now. I have watched the strange buildings of the Mentanicals rise up around us and observed their even stranger social life take shape and form; in my last years I write and print this.

"Print, yes; for the automatic processes for printing and binding and the making of synthetic paper still persist, though the civilization that begot them has passed away. Magazines and books pour from the press. In his latter days man had asked nothing but amusement and leisure—all except a negligible few.

"Art was turned over to the machine. What had been in its inception a device for the coining of myriad plots for popular writers, evolved into a machine-author capable of turning out story after story without repeating itself. Strange, strange, to see those magazines issued by the million copies, to see the books printed, bound, stacked. Useless things! Some day the Mentanicals will turn their attention to them, some day those presses will cease to function. Man's knell has rung; I see that. Why then do I write? Why do I want what I write to be published in some magazine? I hardly know. In all this vast city we few hundred men and women are the only human beings. But in other cities, at other centers of sustenance, men and women exist. Though I believe this to be true, I cannot verify it. Man in his madness destroyed most of the means of communication, and as for the rest, the airships, the public sending stations, from the first they were in the possession of the Mentanicals. Perhaps it is for those isolated units of humanity that I write. The magazine, the printed word is still a means of communication not quite understood by the Mentanicals. Perhaps . . ."

That is the story that I read in the third magazine. Not all that the unhappy Mayne Jackson wrote—pages were missing and parts of pages illegible—but all that I could decipher. In telling the story I give it a continuity which in reality it lacked. One wonders as to the fate of Tomow and Marna, mentioned once and then heard of no more, but at the time I gave little thought to them. I was only overwhelmed with the terrible certainty that the story was no work of fiction, but an actual chronicle of what had happened some time in the past, that the cylinders were not automatic workers doing the bidding of human masters, but an alien form of machine life and intelligence—machine life which had thrown off the yoke of man and destroyed him. Useless to look further for intelligent man, all that was left of him was the beast men among the machines!

Filled with a species of horror at the thought, with sick loathing of the whispering Mentanicals, I straightened up and drew my revolver. I was not myself, I tell you, but animated with a berserk fury. "Damn you!" I cried, "take that—and that!" I pulled the trigger. The roar of the discharge crashed through the huge room, but none of the Mentanicals fell; their metal exteriors were impregnable to such things as bullets. Trembling from the reaction of rage, the feeling of futility, I lifted my hand to hurl the useless weapon at the immobile cylinders, and in the very act of doing so was stiffened into rigidity by the sound of a voice—a human voice! Inexpressibly weird and mournful was that voice, heard so unexpectedly as it was in that place, and in the moment following the explosion of the pistol.

"Oh," cried the voice, as if talking to itself, "to be chained in this spot, never to leave it, never to know what that noise means! Who is there?" it cried. "Who is there?" And then in tones thrilling with unutterable sadness, "Madman that I am to expect an answer!"

But there was an answer! I shouted in reply. I can hardly recall now what I shouted. Hearing that human voice above the infernal whispering of those Mentanicals was like being reprieved from a horror too great to be borne. And as I shouted incoherently, I sprang in the direction the voice seemed to come from, the cylinders making no effort to oppose my doing so. The wall had appeared smooth and unbroken from a distance, but a nearer view showed an opening which gave entrance to a room that, while small in comparison to the huge one it adjoined, was nevertheless large. It was lighted, as were all the rooms I had seen, by a soft light of which I could never trace the source. I entered the room, calling out, filled with excitement, and then at the sight of what I saw, came to an abrupt pause, for on a low dais occupying the middle of the room was the figure of a man with lolling head. Only this head was free—a massive head with towering brow and wide-spaced eyes. The eyes were dark and filled with sorrow, the face—the face of a man in the seventies perhaps—etched with suffering. I stared—stared in astonishment—for the man hung as if crucified on what I at first took for a dully gleaming cross. How can I describe it? I did not see everything in that first glance, of course, nor in the second, though I tell it here as if I had. But his outstretched arms were secured to the cross piece of his support with metal bands, his legs held in the same fashion. So clear was the glass—or crystal—enveloping him from the neck down—that it was some moments before I suspected its presence. I saw the gleaming, transparent tubes through which ran a bluish liquid, the pulsating mechanism at his breast, pumping, pumping, the radiating box at his feet which gave forth a distinct aura, I saw, and could not restrain myself from giving voice to an audible exclamation: "Good God!"

The dark eyes focused on me, the lips moved. "Who are you?" breathed the man.

"My name is Bronson," I replied; "and you?"

"God help me," he said. "I am Bane Borgson."

Bane Borgson! I stared at him, wide-eyed. Where had I heard that name before? My mind groped. Now I had it. In the articles recently read. "You mean . . ."

"Yes," he said. "I am that unhappy man, the inventor of the multiple-cell, the creator of the Mentanicals."

His head lolled wearily. "That was fifteen hundred years ago."

"Fifteen hundred years!" There was incredulity in my voice.

"Yes," he said, "I am that old. And for centuries I have been chained as you see me. I was eighty when my heart began to miss. But I did not wish to die. There were many things I wished to accomplish before yielding up life. The world of man was growing bored, indifferent, but we scientists—a handful of us—lived for the gaining of knowledge. This intellect of mine was considered essential by my fellows; so they experimented with me, and fashioned for my use a mechanical heart—you see it pulsing at my breast—and filled my veins with radiant energy instead of blood. Radium," he said, "that is the basis of the miracle you see; and my body was enclosed in its crystal casing. 'When you are tired,' they said, 'and wish to die . . .' But the Debacle came, and the accursed Mentanicals turned against me, and I was left alone, deserted. Before that my friends offered me death. Fool that I was," cried Bane Borgson, "I refused their gift. 'No,' I told them, 'this is but a temporary upheaval. Man will conquer, must conquer; I await your return.' So they left me, to hunt for food, and I waited, waited, but they never came back." Unchecked tears flowed down the withered cheeks. "Never," he said, "never. And chained in my place I could sense but dimly the tragedy that was overtaking man, the rise to power of the ensouled machines. At first they worshiped me as a god. In some fashion they know that I was their creator and paid me divine honors. A god," he said, "a god, I who had made the destroyers of my kind! But the centuries passed and the superstition waned. A Mentanical lasts a hundred years and then breaks down. Other Mentanicals are built. Fifteen generations of Mentanicals have come and gone since the Debacle, and now the Mentanicals believe that they were not made by man, but have evolved from simpler mechanical forms over a long period of time. That is, their scholars and scientists believe this, though the old superstition still lingers among thousands. They have salvaged the evidence for this new theory out of the earth and the scrap heaps of man and have arranged them in chronological order."

"The museums!" I exclaimed.

He looked at me interrogatively, and I told him of the vast rooms filled with mechanical debris.

"I have never seen them," he said, "but I know that they exist from the talk of the Mentanicals."

He smiled sadly at my amazement.

"Yes," he said, "I have learned to understand and speak the language of the Mentanicals through all the long dreary years there was nothing else for me to do. And through all the weary years they have talked to me, asked my advice, treated me with respect, have housed me here—for to some I am still a god-like beast-man, half machine—look at this mechanical heart, the mechanism at my feet—to the scientists I am the missing link between that lower form of life, man, and that higher form of life which culminates, in themselves, the machine. Yes," he said, "the Mentanicals believe that they have evolved through man to their present high state, and I have confirmed them somewhat in this, for in a sense is it not true?"

He paused, with closed eyes; and as I looked at him, pondered his words, scarcely believing the evidence of my senses, I suddenly became aware of the Mentanicals behind me. They had stood there, a silent group, while the man on the dais spoke; now their whispering began, softly, insistently. The head of the man who called himself Bane Borgson lifted, the dark eyes opened. "They are speaking of you," said Bane Borgson; "they are asking from whence you come. You have never told me that."

"I have come," I replied, "from America."

"America!" he exclaimed. "America has past. There is no America!"

"Not now," I said, "but in my time. . . ."

"Your time?"

"I come from 1931," I said, "by means of a time machine."

"Ah," he breathed. "I am beginning to know, to understand. So that is what it is."

I followed the direction of his eyes, I stared, I gaped; for there, not twelve yards to one side of me, stood the time machine! How I had failed to see it on first entering the room it is impossible to say. Perhaps the sight of the man on the dais had riveted my attention to the exclusion of all else. But there it was, the thing I had given up hopes of ever finding again. With an exclamation of joy I reached its side, I touched it with my hand. Yes, it was the time machine and seemingly undamaged. I believe I laughed hysterically. The road to escape was open. With a lightened heart I turned my attention to what was transpiring in the room. Bane Borgson was talking to the Mentanicals and it was uncanny to see his lips forming their incredible language, to hear them answering back. At length he turned to me. "Listen," he said tensely, "they have never learned to enunciate or understand human speech, but in many ways the Mentanicals are more formidable, more advanced than man in his prime."

I laughed at this. I was once more my assured, devil-may-care self. "And yet they believe that they evolved from that junk heap in their museums!"

"And haven't they?" he asked quietly. "Not in the way they think, perhaps, but still—evolved. Besides you failed to see their museums with articulated bodies of men and beasts. There is much you failed to see!" He paused. "The Mentanicals' system of thought, of science, is coherent and rational to them; and if there be contradictions, well, does that interfere with them making scientific discoveries transcending those of man? They have long been discussing the phenomenon of time and the feasibility of traveling in it. I know that because I have listened to them. Yet for some reason they have been unable to make a time machine. But you know radio—yes, radio—they have been utilizing discoveries in that field to send messages back in time. Your coming here has not been accidental—do you understand that?—not entirely accidental. By means of their time-radio they have willed your coming, made possible your time machine. Don't ask me how, I don't know, not clearly, but they have done it—and you are here! But fortunately it was a creature similar to themselves they expected; to them you are merely an Omo, a beast-man of the machine. So they are puzzled, they don't quite understand (that is why they have been experimenting with you), but soon they will. Listen," he said hoarsely, "can't you realize what a menace to men of the past, of your day, these Mentanicals could be? Oh, your weapons, your machine guns and gas, your powerful explosives! I tell you they would be as nothing against the deadly rays and indescribable forces these Mentanicals could bring against them. Can you gas something that doesn't breathe, shoot what is practically impervious to bullets, that can blow up, that can explode your powder magazines, your high explosives, at a distance of miles? The Mentanicals would enter your age, not to conquer man—they know little of him, regard him as an inferior creature, an evolutionary hand-over of premachine life—but to expand, take over your cities, to . . . to. . . . What do I know of their idea of profit, of self-gain and ambition, but doubtless they have it. Listen!"—The great head surged forward, the dark eyes fixed mine compellingly—"You must leap into your time machine before they can prevent, return to your own day and age, at once!"

"And leave you behind?"

"How can you take me with you? That is impossible. Besides I am weary of life, I have seen too much woe and misery to want to live. The Mentanicals refuse me the boon of death, but you will not refuse. That gun in your hand—there are bullets in it yet—one of them here——"

"No! no!"

"For God's sake, be merciful!"

"I will return for you."

"You must never return! Do you hear me? Not a second time would you escape. Perhaps it is too late to escape now! Up! up with your gun! Aim at the crystal! Its breaking brings me peace and will distract attention while you leap into your machine. Now! now!"

There was nothing else to do, I saw that in a flash; already the Mententacles were reaching towards me and once in their invisible grasp . . . I threw up my hand, the gun spoke with a roar, I heard a tinkling crash of glass, and at the same instant vaulted into the seat of the time machine.

It was a close thing, I tell you, a mighty close thing! They came for me with a rush. The high sides of the passenger seat protected me for a moment from their deadly clutch, but I felt the time machine sway under it, tilt over. In that split second before my hand closed on the lever I saw it all, the rushing [illegible], the shattered glass, Bane Borgson sinking into the apathy of death, his great head lolling, then I pulled the lever, pulled it back to Zero!

III

Captain Bronson stood up. He looked at us bleakly. "You know the rest. The time machine has been moved. In coming back a portion of it must have materialized inside of a solid—the old stone wall—and caused an explosion. But what I want to know—what has been bothering me at times—did I do right to shoot Bane Borgson? I might have escaped without that."

"He wanted to die," said the Doctor at length.

Olson Smith inclined his head. "I don't see what else you could have done."

"To have left him there," I said, "to a life in death, after all those years, no, no, that would have been too horrible!"

Bronson drew a deep breath. "That was my own thought; but I am glad you agree. . . ."

He poured himself a drink.

"If I hadn't seen you disappear with my own eyes," said the Doctor.

"I don't blame you," said Bronson; "the whole thing sounds like a pipe-dream."

"A pipe-dream," I murmured.

"But there is another angle to it," said Bronson grimly. "What Bane Borgson said about the time radio influencing the building of the time machine and compelling my coming. Oh, he may have been raving, poor devil, or mistaken, but remember what the Professor said that night at the dinner, about something whispering in his brain? We'll have to guard against that."

The Doctor said sadly, "Nothing'll whisper to the Professor anymore, Captain."

"What do you mean?"

"I forgot that we'd kept it from you."

"Kept what?"

"The news of the accident. On that night you took your trip into the future, the time machine struck Professor Stringer on the head."

"He is dead?"

"Unfortunately, no. But his brain is affected. The Professor will never be the same again."

Thus the strange and incredible story ends. There is only this to add: Olsen Smith is devoting his vast fortune and influence to fighting the manufacture of mechanical brain-cells for machines. "What do you expect to do," I demand, "change the future?"

"Perhaps," he answers. "One never knows until he tries."

So he goes up and down the country, the world, buying up inventions, chemical processes. It has become a mission with him, a mania. But the trends of the future are not changed by invididuals but by social forces, and the genius of man seems determined to lead him into a more mechanized world.

As for the rest, time alone will tell.

Vengeance in Her Bones

by Malcolm Jameson

The late Malcolm Jameson was a naval officer who turned to writing after he had retired from service. Your editor has always preferred those stories of his that deals with deep water over those that dealt with deep space. There is a verisimilitude about sea stories that all the phony parallels about space-going navies can never attain. The feeling all seafarers get about their ships—the animism with which they regard them—is a real thing. And a strange tale of the sea is far more likely to arouse genuine reader emotion than the most slickly handled but irrevocably synthetic story of a moon-flying navy.

THE MESSENGER from the Navy recruiting office found old Captain Tolliver in his backyard. The crabby, sour-visaged housekeeper took him as far as the hedge back of the house and pointed the retired mariner out to him. Captain Tolliver was reclining in a ragged canvas deckchair taking the sun. He had on faded dungarees, soft and pliant as linen from hundreds of scrubbings, and the stump of his handless left arm rested carelessly on his lap. The peg-leg that matched it lay in alignment with the one good leg. The captain had his eyes closed, comfortably drinking in the sun's good heat, when he heard the crunch of the messenger's step on the gravel walk that separated the vegetable from the flower beds. The old skipper's hearing was still alert, though, and at the sound he raised his lids and looked inquiringly at the newcomer.

"Commander Jason's compliments, sir," said the bluejacket, "and would you please step down to the office. He has a ship for you."

Captain Tolliver smiled feebly, then he closed his eyes against the glare. His eyes were not overstrong these days—the doctors had said something about incipient cataracts.

"Commander Jason is confusing me with my son. He already has a ship, working out of West Coast ports. My sea going days are over. Forever."

To emphasize his point he waved the stump of his left arm, and lifted the pegleg slightly.

"No, sir. It's you he wants. He was very clear about that. He has a ship that only you can command. She's a rogue. They say she will obey no other skipper. He says they have waived your physical defects and will give you all the help you need. But they've got to have you."

The captain shook his head.

"He's wrong, I say. There is no such a ship. There was one once, but she rusted her life away in the back channel. They sold her finally to a wrecking company and broke her up for scrap. All I have to say to that is whoever bought that scrap had better have a care as to how they use it. For she was a vindictive wench. The *Sadie Saxon* bore grudges and would have her way no matter what you did. . . ."

"Yes, sir," said the messenger, eagerly, "that's the ship—the *Sadie Saxon*—a cargo type vessel! They've put her back in commission but she won't leave port. They need ships now that America is at war. Every ship. That's why they need you. The commander says please come. If you want, he'll send an ambulance."

"The *Sadie Saxon*," whispered the old captain, suddenly rapt with nostalgia for World War days when he and she were in their prime.

Then aloud, "He needn't bother about the ambulance. I can get there under my own power, son. Give me a hand so I can get up and go dress. The old uniform still fits, thank God."

Captain Tolliver's senility seemed to drop from him as a cloak the moment the well-worn blue garments were back on his lean frame. He looked a little ruefully at the tarnished gold lace on the sleeves and at the cap device the years had tinted with green mold, but nevertheless he brushed the uniform carefully, squared his shoulders, and marched down the steps without availing himself of the sailor's proffered arm.

"So they didn't break her up after all?" said the captain, as they waited at the curb in the hope a cruising taxi would come by. "How come? I know she was sold."

"Too expensive. She was part of a contract for scrap to be sent to the Japs some months ago, but they only worked three days on her. She killed nine men the first day they brought their cutting torches aboard, all of them in different ways. One of her booms crashed down the second day and wounded two others. On the third day seven suffocated in a hold, and two slipped and fell overboard. The men said she was jinxed and threatened to strike. So they put a tug alongside and hauled her back to her old berth."

Captain Tolliver chuckled.

"For the Japs, huh? She knew it even before they attacked Pearl Harbor, too. I could have told 'em. But what's this about her *refusing* to leave port? Doesn't that sound a little silly to you?"

His faded old eyes twinkled when he asked the question. It was one that did sound silly, when a person came to think about it. Yet he knew it was natural, and one an experienced sailorman would answer as seriously as he could.

"There's no other word for it, sir," replied the bluejacket, soberly. "She was refitted at Newport News, given a crew and loaded with cargo. They took her out to make a voyage to Spanish Morocco, loaded with grain and automobile tires. But she wouldn't pass the Thimble. Her rudder jammed and she piled up hard, and at high tide, too. It took four days to pull her off. They took her back to the yard and looked her steering gear over. It was okay. So they started her out again. That time she sheered out to the other side and grounded near Willoughby Spit. The third time they tried to take her out, she piled up in the dredged channel and blocked all shipping for hours. The yard still insisted there was nothing wrong with her steering gear and suspected sabotage—"

"I know," said the captain. "They didn't find any evidence of it."

"That's right. They gave her crew a clean bill of health and ordered to sea once more. She won't budge. She had steam up and stood a good dock trial, but once she was out in the stream her propellers quit turning over—"

"With full throttle, of course," remarked Captain Tolliver calmly.

"Yes, sir. With full pressure in the boilers and throttle wide open. All she would do was drift until she banged into a dock.

"The tugs got hold of her and tied her up again. The engineers swear her engines are all right and there is no reason why she won't run. She just won't—that's all."

A taxi rounded the corner and caught the sailor's hail. As it slid to a stop before them the captain made one final remark.

"I see. They looked up her record and found she was always that way. Except when I had command of her. Well, I know what is on that little tub's mind and what to do about. It won't be orthodox, but if they want her in service it is the only way."

"What's that, sir."

"Give her her head," said the old man cryptically, then stiffly climbed into the cab.

It was a week later that Captain Tolliver arrived at Norfolk Navy Yard. An aide of the admiral in charge of transport took him to the dock where she lay. She looked spick and span and new and a painter's stage swung under her near bow, and was to play her part in keeping supplies going Eastward in spite of havoc to the West. Tolliver climbed up onto it with some difficulty and patted one of the shiny plates of her nose.

"Up to your old tricks, eh, Sadie?" the astonished aide heard him say. "Well, everything's going to be all right now. We'll go hunting together."

Was it the wash of a passing tug that caused her to bob suddenly up and down that way? The aide shrugged his shoulders and was glad he was in the regular outfit. He would hate to have to go to sea through the war zone on a rogue ship under the command of a decrepit and senile madman of a skipper.

"I am ready to take over," announced Tolliver when he was back on the dock, "whenever those three men whose names I give you have been replaced by others more acceptable."

"Acceptable to whom, sir? I repeat that they are loyal American citizens despite their German ancestry. They have been investigated fully."

"Acceptable to me as representative of the ship," answered the captain with all the old dignity. "When they are off we sail. Not before. Perhaps it is prejudice. Sadie's funny that way. Perhaps your investigation was not as comprehensive as you think. That's your problem."

The aide laughed. The old lunatic, he thought, but I'm stuck I guess. They said give him anything he asked for.

"Very well, sir," was what he said out loud.

Captain Tolliver waited patiently beside the bow until the last of the three scowling men had come down it laden with their bags and dunnage. Then he mounted to the deck and went straightway to the bridge. His hand reached for the whistle pull. A long, triumphant scream of a blast split the air.

"Stand by your lines," bellowed the old man through a megaphone, "and tell the tug never mind. We won't need her."

Two hours later the *Sadie Saxon* swept through the dredged channel, picked up and passed the entrance buoy to the bay. Throbbing with the vibration of her churning screws and rising and falling to the heavy swell outside, she shook herself joyfully at the smell and feel of the open sea. Cape Henry and Cape Charles Lights soon faded behind. The Captain set a course for Bermuda, for the ship's orders had been changed. After the long delay in setting out the situation was different. She was to rendezvous with a Gibraltar bound convoy at the island.

Mate Parker came up to take the watch. It was a cloudy, dark night and the ship was running without lights.

"Keep a sharp lookout," warned the captain, "and handle things yourself. I don't want to be called unless something extraordinary occurs."

"Aye, sir," acknowledged the mate surlily. By rights he should be the skipper of this cranky tub—not this doddering old fool.

The captain got down the ladder the best way he could and groped along the darkened decks until he came to the door of his room. He did not undress at all but lay down in his bunk as he was. The *Sadie Saxon* could be counted on to do the unexpected at any time. He closed his eyes wearily, for the excitement of the day had taxed his strength to the utmost. In a moment he was fast asleep.

It must have been well after midnight when he was roused from his deep slumber. Mr. Parker was standing over him with a look of concern on his face.

"She's gone crazy again, sir," he reported, "and we can't do a thing with her."

"Don't try," directed the captain. "What's she doing?"

"Turned sharp to the left about fifteen minutes ago and is turning up a good twelve revolutions more than her proper speed. The helmsman can't do anything about it. Neither can the engineer. She won't take her helm or throttle. What do we do—fold up and call it a day?"

Captain Tolliver sat up in his bunk.

"Oh, no, by no means. You'll be awfully busy, shortly. Turn out all hands at once. Man your lifeboats and have them ready for lowering. Shut all water-tight doors below and see that there is plenty of shoring handy in case the peak gets stove in. Have the collision mat ready. That's all."

"But the steering?"

"Just let the wheel go. She'll steer herself. She knows where she wants to go. I don't."

The mate left and the old man dragged himself to his emaciated feet and began the laborious journey to the bridge. Once he was up there he made sure that the searchlight was ready to turn on in case he needed it. After that he could only wait.

The wait was not long. Fifteen minutes later there was a shock, a grinding bumping of something under the fore-foot and along the keel. The ship's engines stopped abruptly, then began backing. Captain Tolliver reached for the engine room telegraph and rang it to "Stop."

The ship stopped.

"Collision forward!" shouted the lookout in the bow. "We just ran down a small ship of some sort."

Tolliver could hear the boatswain and his gang dropping into the fore hold to see whether the damage was serious. Then he spoke quietly to the mate who was on the bridge beside him.

"You may put your boats in the water now, Mister. I have a hunch we just ran down a Nazi sub. I'll put on the light as soon as you are lowered."

The mate left on the run, more mystified than ever. A man came up from forward and reported the peak was full up to the waterline but the bulkhead abaft it was holding and the ship seemed to be in no danger.

"Turn on that searchlight," ordered Captain Tolliver, "and sweep aft."

There was a chorus of gasps as the light stabbed out into the murk and almost instantly hit on a large black object rearing up above the waves. It was the bow of a submarine, and even as they sighted it it slid backwards into the deep. But in that brief glimpse they saw several men plunge overboard, and as the light swept to right and left the bobbing heads of a dozen or more men could be seen in the water.

"Pick up those men and be smart about it," yelled Tolliver through his megaphone to the boats. Then he watched as they dragged the survivors into the boats and rowed back to the ship. He watched as they hoisted the boats in and housed them at their davits.

"Put those men under guard," he directed, "and get back on your course. Things will be all right now." And with that he went below to pick up his night's sleep where he had left off.

The arrival of the *Sadie Saxon* at Bermuda caused quite a stir. Many were the congratulations upon the ship's luck in blundering across a U-boat and ramming it in the dark. The two officers and eleven men rescued from the corsair were most welcome to the British Intelligence officers. Hasty arrangements were made for quick repairs to the ship's damaged bow. She had missed the convoy for which she was intended, but there would be other convoys and the little delay was well paid for by the bag of the undersea wolf. Captain Tolliver took his praise modestly.

"It's not all luck," he said. "It is a habit of the *Sadie Saxon*. If you will look up her record in the last war you will see she has done that sort of thing before."

By the time the ship was ready for sea again the hubbub had died down. Captain Tolliver took the position assigned him with entire calm and confidence. It was a big convoy and made up of three columns of ships. The *Sadie Saxon* was given the post of danger and honor as the lead ship of the right hand column. But destroyers frolicked about ahead and on the flanks. It would be costly for any submarine to tackle that well-guarded flotilla.

For three nights they went eastward, steaming without lights and in formation. There was no alarm other than the appearance overhead one day of a trio of scout bombers marked with the black and white crosses of Germany. The anti-aircraft guns of the escorting warships kept them at too great a height to do any damage, and so drove them away. But after their appearance old Captain Tolliver knew anything might happen. The *Sadie Saxon* had behaved most peculiarly all the while they were in sight, vibrating almost as if she had dropped a screw.

"Steady, old girl," whispered the skipper into the binnacle, "you'll have to get used to those. They're an innovation."

It was the night after that that the big attack occurred. The long triple column of ships was plowing along through a dark and misty night and thirty officers on as many bridges were staring anxiously into the murk striving not to lose sight of the tiny blue stern light of the ship ahead. Under the circumstances mutual collision was much more likely than a hostile attack. The orders were strict—maintain radio silence at all costs, never show a light under any circumstances, and above all, keep station.

But the *Sadie Saxon* cared next to nothing about commodore's orders. At a quarter past four in the morning she balked, her engines churning suddenly at full speed astern, to the consternation of the black gang who had had no bells to that effect and were caught off guard. Captain Tolliver was on the bridge when it happened and called sharply to the forward lookouts:

"Look sharply, close aboard! What do you see?"

The ship was turning rapidly to starboard, her rudder jammed hard over, and the helmsman strove wildly to bring the wheel back the other way.

"The wakes of two torpedoes, sir—no, four—five—nine! Coming from starboard, sir."

The streaks of phosphorescent light were visible now from the bridge the *Sadie Saxon* was turning straight into them, she would pass safely between a pair of them.

The aged skipper acted with an alacrity that surprised even him. He yelled for the searchlight and with his own hand jerked the whistle into a strident blast of warning. The searchlight came on and threw its beam straight ahead. There, in a line, were three grey conning towers—three submarines on the surface and in fairly close formation. The nearest destroyer saw them too and at once plunged toward them with its guns blazing. Geysers of white water shot up about the nearest one. A couple of seconds later a bright flash told of a six-inch hit squarely at the base of its conning tower. The other two subs were diving hard, but the one that was hit did not dive. Or did not dive the regular way. It rolled slowly over toward the *Sadie Saxon*, spilling frantic men from its torn superstructure, then settled to its grave.

The leading freighter of the middle column suddenly blew up with a bang, lighting up the sea like day. A moment later the second ship of the left hand column burst into flames. At least two of the nine torpedoes fired had found a mark. But the subs that fired them had no opportunity to fire more. They had been ambushed in their own ambush, and already three destroyers were racing back and forth over the spots where they had last been seen and dropping depth-charges by the score. Similar activities were going on on the other side. Apparently there had been other subs waiting there as well.

The *Sadie Saxon* lay still where she was until the survivors of the two ships destroyed had been brought on board. Then she unaccountably turned due south and ran for an hour at full speed. There she stopped and refused to budge another yard. It was well past the dawn then and a destroyer could be seen on the horizon behind still searching for vestiges of their attackers.

"Signal that destroyer," the captain said, "and tell him to come over here. We've got one spotted."

The destroyer came up within hail, and its captain delivered a blistering message through what must have been an asbestos lined megaphone.

"Will the second on that ship kindly relieve that blithering idiot in command and put him under arrest? The—"

"The sub's right under me," Tolliver yelled back, "playing possum a hundred feet or so down." The ship started moving ahead. "Come in and drop your eggs. Then lock me up if you want."

He turned to Parker who was in a quandary as to what to do. The performances of the ship had shaken his nerve. He had begun to wonder whether *he* was the crazy man. Tolliver ignored him. Instead he walked out to the wing of the bridge and watched the destroyer do its work.

Huge seething hummocks of water rose as the ashcans exploded under the surface. Four of them had gone off and the destroyer was coming back for a second run across the same spot. But there was no need. A half mile away a black nose appeared for a moment on the surface, stuck its beak up into the air, then with a loud hissing of escaping air fell back weakly into the water. Where it had been were three bobbing heads. There *had* been a sub under there!

"Thanks," flashed the destroyer, "well done. Rejoin convoy."

They went past Gib without stopping and made the hazardous trip to Alexandria without incident other than a few sporadic and ineffectual raids by enemy aircraft. At Alexandria Captain Tolliver found this message waiting for him; it was from ONI.

"You are a better guesser than some of our experts. The three men you tipped us off to are in jail. They planned to seize the ship and divert it to a Norwegian port. Congratulations."

The skipper gave a brief snort and then crammed the message into a pocket with his one good hand. Then he learned that on the voyage home he was to carry the convoy's commodore. The "commodore," a retired Navy captain, came aboard and looked around.

He did not say much until they were out of the Mediterranean and well to the west of Portugal. By then they had been joined by many other ships and were steaming in a formation much like the one before, with the difference that this time, being flagship, they were more nearly in the middle of the flotilla.

"You seem to have a remarkable ability to spot submarines, Captain," he remarked. "What is your secret?"

"Me?" said the skipper indignantly. "Hell, I can't see a submarine in the dark or under water any farther than the next man. All the credit is due to Sadie. She *smells* 'em. She hates 'em, too."

"Yes. I know. She rammed several in the last war, didn't she? And didn't they make her into a Q-ship?"

"She did. She was. If you'll look down there on the pedestal of the binnacle stand you'll see some file marks. There are fourteen of 'em now. Each one stands for a U-boat. Or raider. I tell you, she don't like Germans. She was a German herself, you know, but they didn't treat her right. She has a grievance."

"Now, Captain," laughed the commodore, "don't you think you are carrying your little joke too far? After all . . ."

"Do you know the story of this ship?" asked Tolliver fiercely, "well, listen."

It was close to midnight then and a bright moon was shining. The silhouettes of the ships about were distinct as black masses against the glittering white-flecked sea. The two officers went on talking, but their eyes were constantly kept ahead. This was a night when anything might happen.

"In 1914 this ship was spanking new. She was the *Koenigen von Sachsen* or something of the sort, freshly turned out of the Vulcan Works at Stettin. The outbreak of the war caught her at Hoboken and they tied her up for the duration. But when we joined the war in '17 and took her over, her innards were something pitiful to see. Her crew had dry-fired her boilers and they were a mass of sagging tubes. The vandals cracked her cylinders with sledges, threw the valve gear and cylinder heads overboard, and messed up all the auxiliaries. They fixed the wiring so it would short the moment juice was put on it, and they took down steam leads and inserted steel blanks between the flanged joints. In other places they drove out rivets and replaced them with ones of putty. I tell you she was dynamite, even after they fixed up the boilers and main machinery.

"Naturally, having a thing like that done to you would make you sore—especially if you were young and proud and the toast of the Imperial German merchant marine. But that was not all. On her first trip across—I was mate then—a sub slammed a torp into her off the north of Ireland and it took her stern away. Luckily she didn't sink and another ship put a hawser on us and worried us into Greenock where they fixed her up. That would have been bad enough, but on the trip home she smacks into a submarine-laid mine off the Delaware Capes and blows in her bow. We had to beach her near Cape May.

"They rebuilt her again and we set out. But her hard-luck—or mistreatment rather—wasn't at an end. In those days our Secret Service wasn't as good as it is now and a saboteur got aboard. He gummed up things pretty bad. So bad that we caught afire and almost sank in mid-ocean. It took some doggoned hard work to save that ship, but help came and we stayed afloat. Well, that was the end of her patience. She went hog-wild. After that, no matter whether she was in convoy or not, whenever, anything that was German was around—sub, torpedo, raider or what not—she went after it, and never mind engine room bells or rudder. Her whimsies cost me a hand and a leg before we were through, but I didn't mind. I figured I could take it if she could.

"She broke the hearts of three captains. A lot of captains, you ought to know, object to having the ship take charge. They said she was unmanageable and chucked their jobs. That left me in command, though at the time I didn't rate the job. Knowing something of her history, I knew better than to interfere. Her hunches are the best thing I know. No matter what she does . . ."

"Hey!" yelled the commodore, thoroughly alarmed, "watch what you're doing."

The *Sadie Saxon* had sheered sharply from her course and was heading directly across the bows of a ship in the column to one side of them. It was too late then, even if the *Sadie* had been tractable, to do anything about it. A collision was inevitable. The commodore reached for the whistle pull, but Tolliver grabbed his arm and held it.

"Wait," he urged, "this means something. I know her."

An angry, guttural shout came from the bridge of the ship whose path they were about to cross. Then came the rending crash as steel bit into steel—thousands of tons of it at twelve knots speed. The other ship had rammed the *Sadie Saxon* just abreast the mainmast and she heeled over sharply, spill ing deck gear over the off rail. At once pandemonium reigned in the convoy as ships behind sheered out to avoid compounding the already serious collision.

At once fresh confusion succeeded. The ship that was the victim of the *Sadie*'s vengeance suddenly dropped her false bulwarks and the moonlight glinted on the barrels of big guns both fore and aft. Harsh orders sounded in German and the guns began spitting fire. Shells began bursting against ships on all sides as the raider that had insinuated itself into the midst of the convoy began its work. Escort ships began dashing toward the scene, worming their way through the scattering freighters so as to get to a spot where they could open fire.

"I told you," said Captain Tolliver, serenely. "You can always trust her."

But she was sinking, and the crew were lowering what boats they could. The commodore was one of the first to leave, since he was in charge of the entire expedition and must transfer his flag to a surviving ship. Tolliver stayed behind. There was not room enough in the boats for one thing, and his faith in the durability of the *Sadie Saxon* was unlimited. He had seen her in worse plight many times before.

The raider had succeeded in backing away, but it, too, was in a perilous condition. Her bows were torn wide open and she was fast going down by the head. She continued to fire viciously at everything within reach, paying especial attention to the crippled *Sadie Saxon*. A shell struck her funnel and threw fragments and splinters onto the bridge. One fragment struck Captain Tolliver in the right thigh and he went down with a brief curse. Another pair of projectiles burst aft among the rest of the crew who were engaged in freeing a life raft from the mainmast shrouds. It must have killed them all, for when shortly afterward a destroyer ranged alongside and hailed, there was no answering cry.

Tolliver hauled himself to the wing of the bridge and managed to cut an opening in the weather screen. He looked out just in time to see the flaming remnant of the raider sink under the moon-tipped waves. The freighters had all gone and the destroyers were charging off in a new direction. Apparently submarines, working in conjunction with the camouflaged raider, had made their appearance. Tolliver watched a moment, then was aware of a growing faintness. His leg must be bleeding more than he thought. In a moment everything turned black.

It was broad daylight when he came to again. Another peep showed him an empty ocean. The convoy must have gone on, as it was proper and correct it should. And then he heard the hum and roar of airplanes overhead. They swung low, machine-gunning the decks systematically on the assumption men were still aboard. One, more daring than the rest, swooped in between the masts. *Sadie Saxon* was trembling in every plate and rivet.

"Steady, girl," murmured the now delirious captain, laying his cheek against the bridge deck and patting it gently with his one hand, "you can't handle those, I know. But we've done enough, you and I. We can't keep afloat forever."

Her answer was typical. He had no way of knowing how deep she was in the water, or what her trim, but she heeled violently to port, hung there a moment, then turned quietly over on her side. The instant she chose to do it was just as the daring raider plane was diving beneath her radio antennae, ready to drop its final bomb. Captain Tolliver heard its wings snap off and its body crash as the whipping, heeling mast struck it. There was a final burst of flame, and the rest was cool, green water. The old sea-dog felt the waves close over him, but he was smiling and content.

"Bless her old heart," was his last thought, "she even got one of *those*."

The Gostak and the Doshes

by Miles J. Breuer, M.D.

Of late the pages of science-fiction periodicals have been filled with a lot of words about words. We refer to the stories based upon the neo-science of semantics, the talk about "non-Aristotelianism," and the multiple social, political, moral, and psychological concepts that the more fanatical followers of these word schemes derive from them. At risk of calling down the wrath of devotees, your editor must confess that most of these stories do not seem to make too much sense. And it is just possible that some of the readers of "The Gostak and the Doshes" may also express, for a while, similar bewilderment. Dr. Breuer's story, we think, was the very first story about semantics to appear in a fantasy magazine. It was written many years before its time, back in 1930, and we still feel that it is the best of the lot. We also suspect that it points a moral that could well be heeded in these hectic days of ***slogans, advertising, and mass hysterias.***

LET the reader suppose that somebody states: *"The gostak distims the doshes."* You do not know what this means, nor do I. But if we assume that it is English, we know that the *doshes* are *distimmed* by the *gostak*. We know that one *distimmer* of the *doshes* is a *gostak*. If, moreover, doshes are galloons, we know that some galloons are distimmed by the gostak. And so we may go on, and so we often do go on. Unknown writer quoted by Ogden and Richards, in THE MEANING OF MEANING, Harcourt Brace & Co., 1923, also by Walter N. Polakov in MAN AND HIS AFFAIRS, Williams & Wilkins, 1925.

"WHY! That is lifting yourself by your own bootstraps!" I exclaimed in amazed incredulity. "It's absurd."

Woleshensky smiled indulgently. He towered in his chair as though in the infinite kindness of his vast mind there were room to understand and overlook all the foolish little foibles of all the weak little beings that called themselves men. A mathematical physicist lives in vast spaces where a light-year is a footstep, where universes are being born and blotted out, where space unrolls along a fourth dimension on a surface distended from a fifth. To him, human beings and their affairs do not loom very important.

"Relativity," he explained. In his voice there was a patient forbearance at my slowness of comprehension. "Merely relative, [illegible] the earth [illegible] effort to make the moon move through the [illegible] [illegible] just enough to walk down the garden path."

I stared at him and he continued.

"If you had been born and raised on a moving train, no one could convince you that the landscape was not in rapid motion. Well, our conceptions of the universe is quite as relative as that. Sir Isaac Newton tried in his mathematics to express a universe as though beheld by an infinitely removed and perfectly fixed observer. Mathematicians since his time, realizing the futility of such an effort, have taken into consideration that what things 'are' depends upon the person who is looking at them. They have tried to express common knowledge, such as the law of gravitation, in terms that would hold good for all observers. Yet their leader and culminating genius, Einstein, has been unable to express knowledge in terms of pure relativity; he has had to accept the velocity of light as an arbitrarily fixed constant. Why should the velocity of light be any more fixed and constant than any other quantity in the universe?"

"But, what's that got to do with going into the fourth dimension?" I broke in impatiently.

He continued as though I hadn't spoken.

"The thing that interests us now, and that mystifies modern mathematicians, is the question of movement, or more accurately: translation. Is there such a thing as *absolute translation?* Can there be movement—translation—except in *relation* to something else than the thing that moves? All movement we know of is movement in relation to other objects, whether it be a walk down the street, or the movement of the earth in its orbit around the sun. A change of *relative* position. But the mere translation of an isolated object existing alone in space is mathematically inconceivable, for there is no such thing as space in that sense."

"I thought you said something about going into another universe—" I interrupted again.

You can't argue with Wolesbensky. His train of thought went on without a break.

"By translation we understand getting from one place to another. 'Going somewhere' originally meant a movement of our bodies. Yet, as a matter of fact, when we drive in an automobile, we 'go somewhere' without moving our bodies at all. The scene is changed around us, we are somewhere else, and yet we haven't *moved* at all.

"Or suppose you could cast off gravitational attraction for a moment and let the earth rotate under you, you would be going somewhere, and yet not moving ——"

"But that is theory, you can't tinker with gravitation———"

"Every day you tinker with gravitation. When you start upwards in an elevator, your pressure, not your weight, against the floor of it is increased; apparent gravitation between you and the floor of the elevator is greater than before—and that's like gravitation is anyway: inertia and acceleration. But we are talking about translation. The position of everything in the universe must be referred to some sort of coordinates. Suppose we change the angle or direction of the coordinates: then you have 'gone somewhere' and yet you haven't moved, nor has anything else moved."

I looked at him, holding my head in my hands.

"I couldn't swear that I understand that," I said slowly. "And I repeat, that it looks like lifting yourself by your own bootstraps."

The homely simile did not dismay him. He pointed a finger at me as he spoke:

"You've seen a chip of wood bobbing on the ripples of a pond. Now you think the chip is moving; now the water. Yet neither is moving; the only motion is of an abstract thing called a wave.

"You've seen those 'illusion' diagrams, for instance this one of a group of cubes. Make up your mind that you are looking down upon their upper surfaces, and indeed they seem below you. Now change your mind, and imagine that you are down below, looking up. Behold, you see their lower surfaces, you are indeed below them. You have 'gone somewhere,' yet there has been no translation of anything. You have merely changed coordinates."

"Which do you think will drive me insane more quickly—if you *show* me what you mean, or if you keep on talking without showing me?"

"I'll try to show you. There are some types of mind, you know, that cannot grasp the idea of relativity. It isn't the mathematics involved that matters, it's just the inability of some types of mental organization to grasp the fact that the mind of the observer endows his environment with certain properties which have no absolute existence. Thus, when you walk through the garden at night the moon floats from one tree top to another. Is your mind good enough to invert this: make the moon stand still and let the trees move backwards. Can you do that? If so, you can 'go somewhere' into another dimension."

Woleshensky rose and walked to the window. His office was an appropriate setting for such a modern discussion as was ours; situated in a new, ultra-modern building on the University campus, the varnish glossy, the walls clean, the books neatly arranged behind clean glass, the desk in most orderly array, the office was just as precise and modern and wonderful as the mind of its occupant.

"When do you want to go?" he asked.

"Now!"

"Then, I have two more things to explain to you. The fourth dimension is just as much *here* as anywhere else. Right here around you and me things exist and go forward in the fourth dimension, but we do not see them, and are not conscious of them, because we are confined to our own three. Secondly: if we name the four coordinates as Einstein does, *x*, *y*, *z*, and *t*, then we exist in *x*, *y*, and *z*, and move freely about in them, but are powerless to move in *t*. Why? Because *t* is the time dimension, and the time dimension is a difficult one for biological structures that depend on irreversible chemical reactions for their existence. But, biochemical reactions can take place along any one of the other dimensions as well as along t.

"Therefore, let us transform coordinates. Rotate the property of chemical irreversibility from t to z. Since we are organically able to exist (or at least to perceive) in only three dimensions at once, our new time dimension will be z. We shall be unconscious of z and cannot travel in it. Our activities and consciousness will take place along x, y, and t.

"According to fiction writers, to switch into the t dimension, some sort of an apparatus with an electrical field ought to be necessary. It is not. You need nothing more to rotate into the t dimension than you do to stop the moon and make the trees *move* as you ride down the road, or than you do to turn the cubes upside down. It is a matter of *relativity*."

I had ceased trying to wonder or to understand.

"Show me!" was all I could gasp.

"The success of this experiment in changing from the z to the t coordinate has depended largely upon my lucky discovery of a favorable location. It is just as, when you want the moon to ride the tree tops successfully, there have to be favorable features in the topography or it won't work. The edge of this building and that little walk between the two rows of Norway poplars seems to be an angle between planes in the z and t dimensions. It seems to slope downwards, does it not?—Now walk from here to the end and imagine yourself going upwards. That is all. Instead of feeling this building behind and *above* you, conceive it as behind and *below*. Just as on your ride by moonlight, you must tell yourself that the moon is not moving while the trees ride by.—Can you do that? Go ahead then." He spoke in a confident tone, as though he knew exactly what would happen.

Half credulous, half wondering, I walked slowly out of the door. I noticed that Woleshensky settled himself down to the table with a pad and a pencil to some kind of study, and forgot me before I had finished turning around. I looked curiously at the familiar wall of the building and the still more familiar poplar walk, expecting to see some strange scenery, some unknown view from another world. But there were the same old bricks and trees that I had known so long, though my disturbed and wondering frame of mind endowed them with a sudden strangeness and unwontedness. Things I had known for some years, they were, yet so powerfully had Woleshensky's arguments impressed me that I already fancied myself in a different universe. According to the conception of relativity, objects of the x, y, z universe *ought* to look different when viewed from the x, y, t universe.

Strange to say, I had no difficulty at all in imagining myself as going *upwards* on my stroll along the slope. I told myself that the building was behind and below me, and indeed it seemed real that it was that way. I walked some distance along the little avenue of poplars, which seemed familiar enough in all its details, though after a few minutes it struck me that the avenue seemed rather long. In fact, it was much longer than I had ever known it to be before.

With a queer Alice-in-Wonderland feeling I noted it stretching way on ahead of me. Then I looked back.

I gasped in astonishment. The building was indeed *below* me. I looked down upon it from the top of an elevation. The astonishment of that realization had barely broken over me, when I admitted that there was a building down there; but what building? Not the new Morton Hall, at least. It was a long, three-story brick building, quite resembling Morton Hall, but it was not the same. And on beyond there were trees with buildings among them; but it was not the campus that I knew.

I paused in a kind of panic. What was I to do now? Here I was in a strange place. How I had gotten there I had no idea. What ought I do about it? Where should I go? How was I to get back? Odd that I had neglected the precaution of how to get back. I surmised that I must be on the *t* dimension. Stupid blunder on my part, neglecting to find out how to get back.

I walked rapidly down the slope toward the building. Any hopes that I might have had about its being Morton Hall were thoroughly dispelled in a moment. It was a totally strange building, old, and old-fashioned looking. I had never seen it before in my life. Yet it looked perfectly ordinary and natural, and was obviously a University class-room building.

I cannot tell whether it was an hour or a dozen that I spent walking frantically this way and that, trying to decide to go into this building or another, and at the last moment backing out in a sweat of hesitation. It seemed like a year, but was probably only a few minutes. Then I noticed the people. They were mostly young people, of both sexes. Students, of course. Obviously I was on a University campus. Perfectly natural, normal young people, they were. If I were really on the *t* dimension, it certainly resembled the *z* dimension very closely.

Finally I came to a decision. I could stand this no longer. I selected a solitary, quiet looking man, and stopped him.

"Where am I?" I demanded.

He looked at me in astonishment. I waited for a reply, and he continued to gaze at me speechlessly. Finally it occurred to me that he didn't understand English.

"Do you speak English?" I asked hopelessly.

"Of course!" he said vehemently. "What's wrong with you?"

"Something's wrong with something," I exclaimed. "I haven't any idea where I am or how I got here."

"Synthetic wine?" he asked sympathetically.

"Oh, hell! Think I'm a fool? Say, do you have a good man in mathematical physics on the faculty? Take me to him."

"Psychology, I should think," he said, studying me. "Or psychiatry. But I'm a law student and know nothing of either."

"Then make it mathematical physics and I'll be grateful to you."

So I was conducted to the mathematical physicist. The student led me into the very building which corresponded to Morton Hall, and into an office the position of which quite corresponded to that of Woleshensky's office. However, the office was older and dustier, it had a Victorian look about it, and was not as modern as Woleshensky's room. Professor Vibens was a rather small, bald-headed man, with a keen looking face. As I thanked the law-student and started on my story, he looked rather bored, as though wondering why I had picked on him with my tale of wonder. Before I had gotten very far he straightened up a little; and further along he picked up another notch; and before many minutes he was tense in his chair as he listened to me. When I finished, his comment was terse, like that of a man accustomed to thinking accurately and to the point.

"Obviously you come into this world from another set of coordinates. As we are on the *z* dimension, you must have come to us from the *t* dimension——"

He disregarded my attempts to protest at this point.

"Your man Woleshensky has evidently developed the conception of relativity further than we have, although Monpeters' theory comes close enough to it. Since I have no idea how to get you back, you must be my guest. I shall enjoy hearing all about your world."

"That is very kind of you," I said gratefully. "I'm accepting because I can't see what else to do. At least until the time when I can find me a place in your world or get back on my own. Fortunately," I added as an afterthought, "no one will miss me there, unless it be a few classes of students who will welcome the little vacation that must elapse before my successor is found."

Breathlessly eager to find out what sort of a world I had gotten into, I walked with him to his home. And I may state at the outset that if I had found everything upside down and outlandishly bizarre, I should have been far less amazed and astonished than I was. For, from the walk that first evening from Professor Viben's office along several blocks of residence street to his solid and respectable home, through all of my goings about the town and country during the years that I remained in the *t*-dimensional world, I found people and things thoroughly ordinary and familiar. They looked and acted as we do, and their homes and goods looked like ours. I cannot possibly imagine a world and a people that could be more similar to ours without actually being the same. It was months before I got over the idea that I had merely wandered into an unfamiliar part of my own city. Only the actual experience of wide travel and much sight seeing, and the knowledge that there was no such extensive English-speaking country on the world that I knew, convinced me that I must be on some other world, doubtless in the *t* dimension.

"A gentleman who has found his way here from another universe," the professor introduced me to a strapping young fellow who was mowing the lawn.

The professor's son was named John! Could anything be more commonplace?

"I'll love to take you around and show you things tomorrow," John said cordially, accepting the account of my arrival without surprise.

A red-headed servant girl, roast-pork and rhubarb sauce for dinner, and checkers afterwards, a hot bath at bedtime, the ringing of a telephone somewhere else in the house—is it any wonder that it was months before I would believe that I had actually come into a different universe? What slight differences there were in the people and the world, merely served to emphasize the similarity. For instance, I think they were just a little more hospitable and "old fashioned" than we are. Making due allowances for the fact that I was a rather remarkable phenomenon, I think I was welcomed more heartily in this home and in others later, people spared me more of their time and attention from their daily business, than would have happened under similar circumstances in a correspondingly busy city in America.

Again, John found a lot of time to take me about the city and show me banks and stores and offices. He drove a little squat car with tall wheels, run by a spluttering gasoline motor. (The car was not as perfect as our modern cars, and horses were quite numerous in the streets. Yet John was a busy business man, the district superintendent of a life-insurance agency). Think of it! Life insurance in Einstein's *t* dimension.

"You're young to be holding such an important position," I suggested.

"Got started early," John replied. "Dad is disappointed because I didn't see fit to waste time in college. Disgrace to the family, I am."

What in particular shall I say about the city? It might have been any one of a couple of hundred American cities. Only it wasn't. The electric street cars, except for their bright green color, were perfect; they might have been brought over bodily from Oshkosh or Tulsa. The ten-cent stores with gold letters on their signs; drug-stores with soft drinks; a mad, scrambling stock-exchange, the blazing sign of an advertising dentist; brilliant entrances to motion picture theaters, were all there. The beauty-shops did wonders to the women's heads, excelling our own by a good deal, if I am any judge; and at that time I had nothing more important on my mind than to speculate on that question. Newsboys bawled the *Evening Sun*, and the *Morning Gale*, in whose curious, flat type I could read accounts of legislative doings, murders, and divorces, quite as fluently as I could in my own *Tribune* at home. Strangeness and unfamiliarity had bothered me a good deal on a trip to Quebec a couple of years ago; but they were not noticeable here in the *t* dimension.

For three or four weeks the novelty of going around, looking at things, meeting people, visiting concerts, theaters, and department stores, was sufficient to absorb my interest. Professor Vibens' hospitality was so sincerely offered that I did not hesitate to accept, though I assured him that I would repay it as soon as I got established in this world. In a few days I was thoroughly convinced that there was no way back home. Here I must stay, at least until I learned as much as Woleshensky knew about crossing dimensions. Professor Vibens eventually secured for me a position at the University.

It was shortly after I had accepted the position as instructor in experimental physics and had begun to get broken into my work, that I noticed a strange commotion among the people of the city. I have always been a studious recluse, observing people as phenomena rather than participating in their activities. So for some time I noted only in a subconscious way the excited gathering in groups, the gesticulations and blazing eyes, the wild sale of extra editions of papers, the general air of disturbance. I even failed to take an active interest in these things when I made a railroad journey of three hundred miles and spent a week in another city, so thoroughly at home did I feel in this world that when the advisability arose of my studying laboratory methods in another University, I made the trip alone. So absorbed was I in my laboratory problems that I only noted with half an eye the commotion and excitement everywhere, and merely recollected it later. One night it suddenly popped into my head that the country was aroused over something.

That night I was with the Vibens' family in their living room. John tuned in the radio. I wasn't listening to the thing very much; I had troubles of my own. $F = g\frac{m_1 m_2}{r^2}$ was familiar enough to me. It meant the same and held as rigidly here as in my old world. But, what was the name of the bird who had formulated that law? Back home it was Newton. Tomorrow in class I would have to be thoroughly familiar with his name. Pasvieux, that's what it was. What messy surnames. It struck me that it was lucky that they expressed the laws of physics in the same form, and even in the same algebraical letters, or I might have had a time getting them confused—when all of a sudden the radio blatantly bawled:

"THE GOSTAK DISTIMS THE DOSHES!"

John jumped to his feet.

"Damn right!" he shouted, slamming the table with his fist.

Both his father and mother annihilated him with withering glances, and he slunk from the room. I gazed stupefied. My stupefaction continued while the Professor shut off the radio, and both of them excused themselves from my presence. Then suddenly I was alert.

I grabbed a bunch of newspapers, having seen none for several days. Great sprawling headlines covered the front pages:

"THE GOSTAK DISTIMS THE DOSHES."

For a moment I stopped, trying to recollect where I had heard those words before. They recalled something to me. Ah, yes! That very afternoon, there had been a commotion beneath my window on the University campus. I had been busy checking over an experiment so that I might be sure of its success at tomorrow's class, and looked out rather absently to see what was going on.

A group of young men from a dismissed class was passing, and had stopped for a moment.

"I say, the gostak distims the doshes!" said a fine looking young fellow. His face was pale and strained looking.

The young man facing him sneered derisively.

"Aw your grandmother! Don't be a feeble——"

He never finished. The first fellow's fist caught him in the cheek. Several books dropped to the ground. In a moment the two had clinched and were rolling on the ground, fists flying up and down, smears of blood appearing here and there. The others surrounded them, and for a moment appeared to enjoy the spectacle; but suddenly recollected that it looked rather disgraceful on a University campus, and after a lively tussle separated the combatants. Twenty of them, pulling in two directions, tugged them apart.

The first boy strained in the grasp of his captors, his white face was flecked with blood, and he panted for breath.

"Insult!" he shouted, giving another mighty heave to get free. He looked contemptuously around. "The whole bunch of you ought to learn to stand up for your honor. The gostak distims the doshes!"

That was the astonishing incident that these words called to my mind. I turned back to my newspapers.

"Slogan Sweeps the Country," proclaimed the sub-heads. "Ringing Expression of National Spirit! Enthusiasm Spreads Like Wildfire! The new patriotic slogan is gaining ground rapidly," the leading article went on. "The fact that it has covered the country almost instantaneously seems to indicate that it fills a deep and long-felt want in the hearts of the people. It was first uttered during a speech in Walkingdon by that majestic figure in modern statesmanship, Senator Harob. The beautiful sentiment, the wonderful emotion of this sublime thought, are epoch-making. It is a great conception, doing credit to a great man, and worthy of being the guiding light of a great people——"

That was the gist of everything I could find in the papers. I fell asleep, still puzzled about the thing. I was puzzled, because—as I see now and didn't see then—I was trained in the analytical methods of physical science, and knew little or nothing about the ways and emotions of the masses of the people.

In the morning the senseless expression popped into my head as soon as I woke. I determined to waylay the first member of the Vibens family who showed up, and demand the meaning of the thing. It happened to be John.

"John, what's a gostak?"

John's face lighted up with pleasure. He threw out his chest and a look of pride replaced the pleasure. His eyes blazed, and with a consuming enthusiasm, he shook hands with me, as the deacons shake hands with a new convert—a sort of glad welcome.

"The gostak!" he exclaimed. "Hurray for the gostak!"

"But what is a gostak?"

"Not a gostak! *The* gostak. The gostak is—the distimmer of the doshes—see! He distims 'em, see?"

"Yes, yes. But what is distimming? How do you distim?"

"No, no! Only the gostak can distim. The gostak distims the doshes. See?"

"Ah, I see!" I exclaimed. Indeed, I pride myself on my quick wit. "What are doshes? Why, they are the stuff distimmed by the gostak. Very simple!"

"Good for you!" John slapped my back in huge enthusiasm. "I think it wonderful for you to understand us so well, after being here only a short time. You are very patriotic."

I gritted my teeth tightly, to keep myself from speaking.

"Professor Vibens, what's a gostak?" I asked in the solitude of his office an hour later.

He looked pained.

He leaned back in his chair and looked me over elaborately, and waited some time before answering.

"Hush!" he finally whispered. "A scientific man may think what he pleases; but if he says too much, people in general may misjudge him. As a matter of fact, a good many scientific men are taking this so called patriotism seriously. But a mathematician cannot use words loosely; it has become second nature with him to inquire closely into the meaning of every term he uses."

"Well, doesn't that jargon mean anything at all?" I was beginning to be puzzled in earnest.

"To me, it does not. But it seems to mean a great deal to the public in general. It's making people do things, is it not?"

I stood a while in stupefied silence. That an entire great nation should become fired up over a meaningless piece of nonsense! Yet, the astonishing thing was that I had to admit that there was plenty of precedent for it in the history of my own 3-dimensional world. A nation exterminating itself in civil wars to decide which of two profligate royal families should be privileged to waste the people's substance from the throne; a hundred thousand crusaders marching to death for an idea that to me means nothing; a meaningless, untrue advertising slogan that sells millions of dollars' worth of cigarettes to a nation to the latter's own detriment—haven't we seen it over and over again?

"There's a public lecture on this stuff tonight at the First Church of The Salvation," Professor Vibens suggested.

"I'll be there," I said. "I want to look into the thing."

That afternoon there was another flurry of "extras" over the street; people gathered in knots and gesticulated with open newspapers.

"War! Let 'em have it!" I heard men shout.

"Is our national honor a rag to be muddied and trampled on?" the editorial asked.

As far as I could gather from reading the papers, there was a group of nations across an ocean that was not taking the gostak seriously. A sugwhose pennant bore the slogan had been refused entrance to an Engtalian harbor because it flew no national ensign. The Executive had dispatched a diplomatic note. An evangelist who had attempted to preach the gospel of the distimmed doshes at a public gathering in Itland had been ridden on a rail and otherwise abused. The Executive was dispatching a diplomatic note.

Public indignation waxed high. Derogatory remarks about "wops" were flung about. Shouts of "Holy war!" were heard. I could feel the tension in the atmosphere as I took my seat in the crowded church in the evening. I had been assured that the message of the gostak and the doshes would be thoroughly expounded so that even the most simple-minded and uneducated people could understand it fully. Although I had my hands full at the University, I was so puzzled and amazed at the course that events were taking that I determined to give the evening to finding out what the "slogan" meant.

There was a good deal of singing before the lecture began. Mimeographed copies of the words were passed about, but I neglected to preserve them, and do not remember them. I know there was one solemn hymn that reverberated harmoniously through the great church, a chanting repetition of "The Gostak Distims the Doshes." There was another stirring martial air, that began: "Oh the Gostak! Oh the Gostak!"—and ended with a swift cadence on the Gostak Distims the Doshes!" The speaker had a rich, eloquent voice and a commanding figure. He stepped out and bowed solemnly.

"The gostak distims the doshes," he pronounced impressively. "Is it not comforting to know that there is a gostak; do we not glow with pride because the doshes are distimmed? In the entire universe there is no more profoundly significant fact: the gostak distims the doshes. Could anything be more complete, yet more tersely emphatic. The gostak distims the doshes!" Applause. "This thrilling truth affects our innermost lives. What would we do if the gostak did not distim the doshes? Without the gostak, without doshes, what would we do? What would we think? How would we feel?——" Applause again.

At first I thought this was some kind of an introduction. I was inexperienced in listening to popular speeches, lectures, and sermons. I had spent most of my life in the study of physics and its accessory sciences. I could not help trying to figure out the meaning of whatever I heard. When I found none I began to get impatient. I waited some more, thinking that soon he would begin on the real explanation. After thirty minutes of the same sort of stuff as I have just quoted, I gave up trying to listen. I just sat and hoped he would soon be through. The people applauded and grew more excited. After an hour, I stirred restlessly; I slouched down in my seat and sat up by turns. After two hours I grew desperate; I got up and walked out. Most of the people were too excited to notice me. Only a few of them cast hostile glances at my retreat.

The next day the mad nightmare began for me. First there was a snow-storm of "extras" over the city, announcing the sinking of a merchantboat by an Ingalian cruiser. A dispute had arisen between the officers of the merchantman and the port officials because the latter had jeered disrespectfully at the gostak. The merchantman picked up and started out without having fulfilled all the Customs requirements. A cruiser followed it and ordered it to return. The captain of the merchantman told them that the gostak distims the doshes, whereupon the cruiser fired twice and sunk the merchantman. In the afternoon came the "extras" announcing the Executive's declaration of war.

Recruiting offices opened; the University was depleted of its young men; uniformed troops marched through the city, and railway trains full of them went in and out. Campaigns for raising war loans; homeguards, women's auxiliaries, ladies' aid societies making bandages, young women enlisting as ambulance drivers—it was indeed war, all of it to the constantly repeated slogan: "The gostak distims the doshes."

I could hardly believe that it was really true. There seemed to be no adequate cause for a war. The huge and powerful nation had dreamed a silly slogan and flung it in the world's face. A group of nations across the water had united into an alliance, claiming they had to defend themselves against having forced upon them a principle they did not desire. The whole thing at the bottom had no meaning. It did not seem possible that there would actually be a war; it seemed more like going through a lot of elaborate play-acting.

Only when the news came of a vast naval battle of doubtful issue, in which ships had been sunk and thousands of lives lost, did it come to me that they meant business. Black bands of mourning appeared on sleeves and in windows. One of the allied countries was invaded and a front line set up. Reports of a division wiped out by an airplane attack; of forty thousand dead in a five-day battle; of more men and more money needed, began to make things look real. Haggard men with bandaged heads and arms in slings appeared on the streets; a church and an auditorium were converted into hospitals; and trainloads of wounded were brought in. To convince myself that this thing was so, I visited these wards, and saw with my own eyes the rows of cots, the surgeons working on ghastly wounds, the men with a leg missing or with a hideously disfigured face.

Food became restricted; there was no white bread, and sugar was rationed. Clothing was of poor quality; coal and oil were obtainable only on government permit. Businesses were shut down. John was gone; his parents received news that he was missing in action.

Real it was; there could be no more doubt of it. The thing that made it seem most real was the picture of a mangled, hopeless wreck of humanity sent back from the guns, a living protest against the horror of war. Suddenly someone would say: "The gostak distims the doshes!" and the poor wounded fragment would straighten up and put out his chest with pride, and an unquenchable fire would blaze in his eyes. He did not regret having given his all for that. How could I understand it?

And real it was when the draft was announced. More men were needed, volunteers were insufficient. Along with the rest, I complied with the order to register, doing so in a mechanical fashion, thinking little of it. Suddenly the coldest realization of the reality of it was flung at me, when I was informed that my name had been drawn and that I would have to go!

All this time I had looked upon this mess as something outside of me; something belonging to a different world, of which I was not a part. Now here was a card summoning me to training camp. With all this death and mangled humanity in the background, I wasn't even interested in this world. I didn't belong here. To be called upon to undergo all the horrors of military life, the risk of a horrible death, for no reason at all! For a silly jumble of meaningless sounds.

I spent a sleepless night in maddened shock from the thing. In the morning a wild and haggard caricature of myself looked back at me from the mirror. But I had revolted. I intended to refuse service. If the words conscientious objector ever meant anything, I certainly was one. Even if they shot me for treason at once, that would be a fate less hard to bear than going out and giving my strength and my life for—for nothing at all.

My apprehensions were quite correct. With my usual success at self-control over a seething interior, I coolly walked to the draft office and informed them that I did not believe in their cause and could not see my way to fight for it. Evidently they had suspected something of that sort already, for they had the irons on my wrists before I had hardly done with my speech.

"Period of emergency," said a beefy tyrant at the desk; "no time for stringing out a civil trial. Courtmartial!"

He said it at me vindictively, and the guards jostled me roughly down the corridor; even they resented my attitude. The court-martial was already waiting for me. From the time I walked out of the lecture at the church I had been under secret surveillance; and they knew my attitude thoroughly. That is the first thing the president of the court informed me.

My trial was short. I was informed that I had no valid reason for objecting. Objectors because of religion, because of nationality, and similar reasons, were readily understood; a jail sentence to the end of the war was their usual fate. But I admitted that I had no intrinsic objection to fighting; I merely jeered at their holy cause. That was treason unpardonable.

"Sentenced to be shot at sunrise!" the president of the court announced.

The world spun around with me. But only for a second. My self-control came to my aid. With the curious detachment that comes to us in such emergencies, I noted that the court-martial was being held in Professor Vibens' office, that dingy little Victorian room, where I had first told my story of traveling by relativity and had first realized that I had come to the *t*-dimensional world. Apparently it was also to be the last room I was to see in this same world. I had no false hopes that the execution would help me back to my own world, as such things sometimes do in stories. When life is gone, it is gone, whether in one dimension or another. I would be just as dead in the z dimension as in the t dimension.

"Now, Einstein, or never!" I thought. "Come to my aid, O Riemann! O Lobatchewsky! If anything will save me it will have to be a tensor or a geodesic."

I said it to myself rather ironically. Relativity had brought me here. Could it get me out of this?

Well! Why not?

If the form of a natural law, yea, if a natural object varies with the observer who expresses it, might not the truth and the meaning of the gostak slogan also be a matter of relativity? It was like making the moon ride the tree tops again. If I could be a better relativist, and put myself in these people's place, perhaps I could understand the gostak. Perhaps I would even be willing to fight for him or it.

The idea struck me suddenly. I must have straightened up and some bright change must have passed over my features, for the guards who led me looked at me curiously and took a firmer grip on me. We had just descended the steps of the building and had started down the walk.

Making the moon ride the tree tops! That was what I needed now. And that sounded as silly to me as the gostak. And the gostak did not seem so silly. I drew a deep breath and felt very much encouraged. The viewpoint of *relativity* was somehow coming back to me. Necessity manages much. I could understand how one might fight for the idea of a gostak distimming the doshes. I felt almost like telling these men. Relativity is a wonderful thing. They led me up the slope, between the rows of poplars.

Then it all suddenly popped into my head; how I had gotten here by changing my coordinates, insisting to myself that I was going *upwards*. Just like making the moon stop and making the trees ride, when you are out riding at night. Now I was going upwards. In my own world, in the z dimension, this same poplar was *down* the slope.

"It's downwards!" I insisted to myself. I shut my eyes, and imagined the building behind and *above* me. With my eyes shut, it did seem downwards. I walked for a long time before opening them. Then I opened them and looked around.

I was at the end of the avenue of poplars. I was surprised. The avenue seemed short. Somehow it had become shortened; I had not expected to reach the end so soon. And where were the guards in olive uniform? There were none.

I turned around and looked back. The slope extended on backwards above me. Indeed I had walked downwards. There were no guards, and the fresh, new building was on the hill behind me.

Woleshensky stood on the steps.

"Now what do you think of a t dimension," he called out to me.

Woleshensky!

And a *new* building, modern! Vibens' office was in an old, Victorian building. What was there in common between Vibens and Woleshensky? I drew a deep breath. The comforting realization spread gratefully over me that I was back in my native dimension. The *postak* and the war were somewhere else. Here were peace and Woleshensky.

I hastened to pour out the story to him.

"What does it all mean?" I asked when I was through. "Somehow—vaguely—it seems that it ought to mean something."

"Perhaps," he said in his kind, sage way, "we really exist in four dimensions. A part of us and our world that we cannot see and are not conscious of, projects on into another dimension; just like the front edges of the books in the bookcase, turned away from us. You know that the section of a cone cut by the y plane looks different than the section of the same conic by the z plane? Perhaps what you saw was our own world and our own selves, intersected by a different set of co-ordinates. *Relativity*, as I told you in the beginning."

Storm Warning

by Donald A. Wollheim

The story of "Storm Warning" grew directly out of the great impression that G. R. Stewart's remarkable book "Storm" made upon the writer. Constantly your editor has been impressed with the sparsity of our actual knowledge of the world—the things we think we know best so often turn out to be scarcely more than isolated fragments of a greater knowledge, our sciences mere segments of other sciences. Biology, chemistry, physics, astronomy, all seem to interlock, and the more we know the more we realize how tenuous our grip on universal understanding is. "Storm" impressed the writer with this observation on even that most prosaic of topics, the weather. And "Storm Warning" was the result.

WE HAD NO indication of the odd business that was going to happen. The boys at the Weather Bureau still think they had all the fun. They think that being out in it wasn't as good as sitting in the station watching it all come about. Only there are some things they'll never understand about the weather, some things I think Ed and I alone will know. We were in the middle of it all.

We were riding out of Rock Springs at sunrise on a three day leave but the Chief Meteorologist had asked us to take the night shift until then. It was just as well, for the Bureau was on the edge of the desert and we had our duffle and horses tethered outside. The meteor fall of two days before came as a marvelous excuse to go out into the badlands of the Great Divide Basin. I've always liked to ride out in the glorious, wide, empty Wyoming land and any excuse to spend three days out there was good.

Free also from the routine and monotony of the Weather Bureau as well. Of course I like the work, but still the open air and the open spaces must be bred in the blood of all of us born and raised out there in the West. I know it's tame and civilized today but even so, to jog along with a haphazard sort of prospector's aim was really fine.

Aim was of course to try and locate fragments of the big meteor that landed out there two nights before. Lots of people had seen it, myself for one, because I happened to be out on the roof taking readings. There had been a brilliant streak of blue-white across the northern sky and a sharp flash way off like an explosion. I understand that folks in Superior claim to have felt a jolt as if something big had smashed up out there in the trackless dust and dunes between Mud Lake, Morrow Creek, and the town. That's quite a lot of empty territory and Ed and I had about as much chance of finding the meteor as a needle in the haystack. But it was a swell excuse.

"Cold Front coming down from Saskatchewan," the Chief said as he came in and looked over our charts. We were getting ready to leave. "Unusual for this time of year."

I nodded unworried. We had the mountains between us and any cold wave from that direction. We wouldn't freeze at night even if the cold got down as far as Casper, which would be highly unlikely. The Chief was bending low over the map tracing out the various lows and highs. He frowned a bit when he came to a new little low I had traced in from the first reports of that day.

"An unreported low turning up just off Washington State. That's really odd. Since when are storms originating so close?"

"Coming east too and growing according to Seattle's wire," said Ed. The Chief sat down and stared at the map.

"I don't like it, it's all out of whack," he said. Then he stood up and held out his hand to me.

"Well, good-bye, boys and have a good time. If you find that meteor, bring me back a chunk too."

"Sure will," I said and we shook hands and yelled at the other boys and went out.

The first rays of the sun were just coming up as we left. Outwards we jogged easily, the town and civilization fell behind rapidly and we went on into the golden glow of the Sweetwater basin.

We made good time that day though we didn't hurry. We kept up a nice steady trot, resting now and then. We didn't talk much for we were too busy just breathing in the clean open air and enjoying the sensation of freedom. An occasional desert toad or the flash of a disturbed snake were the only signs of life we saw and the multiform shapes of the cactus and sage our only garden. It was enough.

Towards evening, at the Bureau, the Chief first noted the slight growth of the Southern Warm Front. A report from Utah set him buzzing. The Cold Front had now reached the borders of Wyoming and was still moving on. The baby storm that was born where it had no right to be born was still growing and now occupied a large area over Oregon and Idaho. The Chief was heard to remark that the conjunction of things seemed to place southwest Wyoming as a possible center of lots of wild weather. He started worrying a bit about the two of us.

We didn't worry. We didn't have any real indications but our weather nerves reacted aright. We felt a sort of odd expectancy in the air as we camped. Nothing definite, a sort of extra stillness in the air as if forces were pressing from all sides, forces that were still far away and still vague.

We talked a bit around the fire about the storm that the Chief had noted when we left. Ed thought it would fizzle out. I didn't. I had a feeling then that it wasn't just a short lived freak. I think I had an idea we might see something of it.

Next morning there was just the faintest trace of extra chill in the air. I'm used to Wyoming mornings and I know just how cold it ought to be at sunrise and how hot. This morning it was just the slightest bit chillier.

"That Canadian Cold Front must have reached the other side of the mountains," I said, waving towards the great rampart of the Rockies to the East. "We're probably feeling the only tendril of it to get over."

"That's sort of odd," Ed said. "There shouldn't be any getting over at all. It must be a very powerful front."

I nodded and wondered what the boys in the bureau were getting on it. Probably snowfall in the northern part of the state. If I had known what the Chief knew that morning, I might have started back in a hurry. But we didn't and I guess we saw something that no one else has as a result.

For at the bureau, the Chief knew that morning that we were in for some extraordinary weather. He predicted for the Rock Springs paper the wildest storm ever. You see the Southern Warm Front had definitely gotten a salient through by that time. It was already giving Salt Lake City one of the hottest days on record and what was more the warm wave was coming our way steadily.

The next thing was that storm from the west. It was growing smaller and tighter again and had passed over Idaho Falls two hours ago raging and squawling. It was heading in our direction like an arrow from a bow.

And finally the Cold Front had done the impossible. It was beginning to sweep over the heights and to swoop down into the Divide basin, heading straight for the Warm Front coming north.

And there was Ed and I with a premonition and nothing more. We were riding along right into the conflux of the whole mess and we were looking for meteors. We were looking for what we expected to be some big craters or pockmarks in the ground and a bunch of pitted iron rocks scattered around a vicinity of several miles.

Towards ten that morning we came over a slight rise and dipped down into a bowl-shaped region. I stopped and stared around. Ed wheeled and came back.

"What's up?" he asked.

"Notice anything funny in the air?" I asked and gave a deep sniff.

Ed drew in some sharp breaths and stared around.

"Sort of odd," he finally admitted. "Nothing I can place but it's sort of odd."

"Yes," I answered. "Odd is the word. I can't place anything wrong but it seems to smell differently than the air did a few minutes ago." I stared around and wrinkled my brow.

"I think I know now," I finally said. "The temperature's changed somewhat. It's warmer."

Ed frowned. "Colder, I'd say."

I became puzzled. I waved my hands through the air a bit. "I think you're right. I must be wrong. Now it feels a bit colder."

Ed walked his horse a bit. I stared slowly after him.

"Y'know," I finally said, "I think I've got it. It's colder but it *smells* like warm air. I don't know if you can quite understand what I'm driving at. It smells as if the temperature should be steaming yet actually it's sort of chilly. It doesn't smell natural."

Ed nodded. He was puzzled and so was I. There was something wrong here. Something that got on our nerves.

Far ahead I saw something sparkle. I stared as we rode and then mentioned it to Ed. He looked too.

There was something, no, several things that glistened far off at the edge of the bowl near the next rise. They looked like bits of glass.

"The meteor, maybe?" queried Ed. I shrugged. We rode steadily on in that direction.

"Say, something smells funny here," Ed remarked, stopping again.

I came up next to him. He was right. The sense of strangeness in the air had increased the nearer we got to the glistening things. It was still the same warm-cold. There was something else again. Something like vegetation in the air. Like something growing only there still wasn't any more growth than the usual cacti and sage. It smelled differently from any other growing things and yet it smelled like vegetation.

It was unearthly, that air. I can't describe it any other way. It was unearthly. Plant smells that couldn't come from any plant or forest I had ever encountered, a cold warmness unlike anything that meteorology records.

Yet it wasn't bad, it wasn't frightening. It was just peculiar. It was mystifying.

We could see the sparkling things now. They were like bubbles of glass. Big iridescent glassy balls lying like some giant child's marbles on the desert.

We knew then that, if they were the meteors, they were like none that had ever been recorded before. We knew we had made a find that would go on record and yet we weren't elated. We were ill at ease. It was the funny weather that did it.

I noticed then for the first time that there were black clouds beginning to show far in the west. It was the first wave of the storm.

We rode nearer the strange bubbles. We could see them clearly now. They seemed cracked a bit as if they had broken. One had a gaping hole in its side. It must have been hollow, just a glassy shell.

Ed and I stopped short at the same time. Or rather our horses did. We were willing, too, but our mounts got the idea just as quickly. It was the smell.

There was a new odor in the air. A sudden one. It had just that moment wafted itself across our nostrils. It was at first repelling. That's why we stopped. But smelling it a bit took a little of the repulsion away. It wasn't so very awful.

In fact it wasn't actually bad. It was hard to describe. Not exactly like anything I've ever smelled before. Vaguely it was acrid and vaguely it was dry. Mostly I would say that it smelled like a curious mixture of burning rubber and zinc ointment.

It grew stronger as we sat there and then it began to die away a bit as a slight breeze moved it on. We both got the impression at the same time that it had come from the broken glass bubbles.

We rode on cautiously.

"Maybe the meteors landed in an alkali pool and there's been some chemical reaction going on," I opined to Ed. "Could be," he said and we rode nearer.

The black clouds were piling up now in the west and a faint breeze began to stir. Ed and I dismounted to look into the odd meteors.

"Looks like we better get under cover till it blows over," he remarked.

"We've got a few minutes, I think," I replied. "Besides by the rise right here is just about the best cover around."

Back at the Weather Station, the temperature was rising steadily and the Chief was getting everything battened down. The storm was coming and, in meeting the thin edge of the Warm Front wedge which was now passing Rock Springs, would create havoc. Then the cold wave might get that far because it was over the Divide and heading for the other two. In a few minutes all hell would break loose. The Chief wondered where we were.

We were looking into the hole in the nearest bubble. The things—they must have been the meteors we were looking for—were about twelve feet in diameter and pretty nearly perfect spheres. They were thick-shelled, smooth, and very glassy and iridescent, like mother-of-pearl on the inside. They were quite hollow, and we couldn't figure out what they were made of and what they could be. Nothing I had read or learned could explain the things. That they were meteoric in origin I was sure because there was the evidence of the scattered ground and broken rocks about to show the impact. Yet they must have been terrifically tough or something because, save for the few cracks and the hole in one, they were intact.

Inside they stank of that rubber-zinc smell. It was powerful. Very powerful.

The stink had obviously come from the bubbles—there was no pool around.

It suddenly occurred to me that we had breathed air of some other world. For if these things were meteoric and the smell had come from the inside, then it was no air of Earth that smelled like burning rubber and zinc oint ment. It was the air of somewhere, I don't know where, somewhere out among the endless reaches of the stars. *Somewhere out there*, out beyond the sun.

Another thought occurred to me.

"Do you think these things could have carried some creatures?" I asked. Ed stared at me a while, bit his lip, looked slowly around. He shrugged his shoulders without saying anything.

"The oddness of the air," I went on, "maybe it was like the air of some other world. Maybe they were trying to make our own air more breathable to them?"

Ed didn't answer that one either. It didn't require any. And he didn't ask me whom I meant by "they."

"And what makes the stink?" Ed finally commented. This time I shrugged.

Around us the smell waxed and waned. As if breezes were playing with a stream of noxious vapor. And yet, I suddenly realized, no breezes were blowing. The air was quite still. But still the smell grew stronger at one moment and weaker at another.

It was as if some creature were moving silently about, leaving no trace of itself save its scent.

"Look!" said Ed suddenly. He pointed to the west. I looked and stared at the sky. The whole west was a mass of seething dark clouds. But it was a curiously arrested mass. There was a sharply defined edge to the area—an edge of blue against which the black clouds piled in vain and we could see lightnings crackle and flash in the storm. Yet no wind reached us and no thunder and the sky was serene and blue overhead.

It looked as if the storm had come up against a solid obstacle beyond which it could go no further. But there was no such obstacle visible.

As a meteorologist I knew that meant there must be a powerful opposing bank of air shielding us. We could not see it for air is invisible but it must be there straining against the cloud bank.

I noticed now that a pressure was growing in my ears. Something was concentrating around this area. We were in for it if the forces of the air ever broke through.

The stink welled up powerfully, suddenly. More so than it had before. It seemed to pass by us and through us and around us. Then again it was gone. It almost vanished from everything. We could detect but the faintest traces of it after that passage.

Ed and I rode out to an outcropping of rock. We dismounted. We got well under the rock and we waited. It wouldn't be long before the protecting air bank gave way.

To the south now, storm clouds materialized, and then finally to the east and north. As I learned later the cold wave had eddied around us and met the Equatorial Front at last and now we were huddled with some inexplicable prizes from unknown space and a bunch of strange stinks and atmosphere, ringed around by a seething raging sea of storm. And yet above, the sky was still blue and clear.

We were in the midst of a dead center, in the midst of an inexplicable high pressure area, most of whose air did not originate on Earth and the powers of the Earth's atmosphere were hurling themselves against us from every direction.

I saw that the area of clear was slowly but surely contracting. A lashing freezing breeze suddenly enveloped us. A breakthrough from the north. But it seemed to become curiously blunted and broken up by countless threads of the oddly reeking air. I realized as the jet of cold air reached my lungs how different the atmosphere was in this pocket from that we are accustomed to breathe. It was truly alien.

And yet always this strange air seemed to resist the advances of the normal. Another slight breeze, this one wet and warm came in from the south and again a whirl of the rubbery odored wind dispersed it.

Then there came an intolerable moment. A moment of terrific compression and rise and the black storm clouds tore through in wild streaks overhead and spiderwebbed the sky rapidly into total darkness. The area of peace became narrow, restricted, enclosed by walls of lightning shot storm.

I got an odd impression then. That we were embattled. That the forces of nature were determined to annihilate and utterly rip apart our little region of invading alien air, that the meteor gases were determined to resist to the last to keep their curious *ranks* intact!

The lightning flashed and flashed. Endless giant bolts yet always outside our region. And we heard them only when a lance of cold or hot storm pierced through to us. The alien air clearly would not transmit the sounds—it was standing rigid against the interrupting vibrations!

Ed and I have conferred since then. We both agree that we had the same impressions. That a genuine life and death fight was going on. That that pocket of otherworldly air seemed to be consciously fighting to keep itself from being absorbed by the storm, from being diffused to total destruction so that no atom of the unearthly gases could exist save as incredibly rare elements in the total atmosphere of the Earth. It seemed to be trying to maintain its entirety, its identity.

It was in that last period that Ed and I saw the inexplicable things. We saw the things that don't make sense. For we saw part of the clear area suddenly contract as if some of the defending force had been withdrawn and we saw suddenly one of the glass globes, one of the least cracked, whirl up from the ground and rush into the storm, rush straight up!

It was moving through the clear air without any visible propulsion. We thought then that perhaps a jet of the storm had pierced through to carry it up as a ball will ride on a jet of water. But no, for the globe hurled itself into the storm, contrary to the direction of the winds, against the forces of the storm.

The globe was trying to break through the ceiling of black to the clear ne above. But the constant lightnings that flickered around it kept it in our sight. Again and again it darted against the mass of clouds and was hurled wildly and furiously about. For a moment we thought it would force its way out of our sight and then there was a sudden flash and a sharp snap that even we heard and a few fragments of glassy stuff came falling down.

I realized suddenly that the storm had actually abated its fury while this strange thing was going on. As if the very elements themselves watched the outcome of the ball's flight. And now the storm raged in again with renewed vigor as if triumphant.

The area was definitely being forced back. Soon not more than twenty yards separated us from the front and we could hear the dull endless rumbling of the thunder. The stink was back again all around us. Tiny trickles of cold wet air broke through now and then but were still being lost in the smell.

Then came the last moment. A sort of terrible crescendo in the storm and the stink finally broke for good. I saw it and what I saw is inexplicable save for a very fantastic hypothesis which I believe only because I must.

After that revealing moment the last shreds of the stellar air broke for good. For only a brief instant more the storm raged, an instant in which for the first and last time Ed and I got soaked and hurled around by the wind and rain and the horses almost broke their tethers. Then it was over. The dark clouds lifted rapidly. In a few minutes they had incredibly thinned out, there was a slight rain, and by the time ten more minutes had passed, the sun was shining, the sky was blue and things were almost dry. On the northern horizon faint shreds of cloud lingered but that was all.

Of the meteor globes only a few shards and splinters remained.

I've talked the matter over as I said and there is no really acceptable answer to the whole curious business. We know that we don't really know very much about things. As a meteorologist I can tell you that. Why, we've been discussing the weather from caveman days and yet it was not more than twenty years ago that the theory of weather fronts was formulated which first allowed really decent predictions. And the theory of fronts, which is what we modern weather people use, has lots of imperfections in it. For instance we still don't know anything about the why of things. Why does a storm form at all? We know how it grows, sure, but why did it start and how?

We don't know. We don't know very much at all. We breathe this air and it was only in the last century that we first began to find out how many different elements and gases made it up and we don't know for sure yet.

I think it's possible that living things may exist that are made of gas only. We're protoplasm you know but do you know that we're not solid matter—we're liquid? Protoplasm is liquid. Flesh is liquid arranged in suspension in cells of dead substances. And most of us is water, and water is the origin of all life. And water is composed of two common gases, hydrogen and oxygen. And those gases are found everywhere in [illegible] astronomers say.

So I say that if the elements of our life can be boiled down to gases, then why can't gases combine as gases and still have the elements of life? Water is always present in the atmosphere as vapor, then why not a life as a sort of water vapor variant?

I think it makes sense. I think it might smell odd if we accidentally inhaled such a vapor life. Because we could inhale it like we do water vapor. It might smell, say for example, like burning rubber and zinc ointment.

Because in that last moment when the storm was at its height and the area of unearthly air was compressed to its smallest I noticed that at one point a definite outline could be seen against the black clouds and the blue-white glare of the lightning. A section of the otherworldly air had been sort of trapped and pinned off from the main section. And it had a definite shape under that terrible storm pressure.

I can't say what it was like because it wasn't exactly like anything save maybe a great amoeba being pushed down against the ground. There were lots of arms and stubby wiggly things sticking out and the main mass was squashy and thick. And it flowed along the ground sort of like a snail. It seemed to be writhing and trying to slither away and spread out.

It couldn't because the storm was hammering at it. And I definitely saw a big black mass, round like a fist, hammer at one section of the thing's base as it tried to spread out.

Then the storm smashed down hard on the odd outline and it squashed out flat and was gone.

I imagine there were others and I think that when they aren't being compressed they could have spread out naturally about a hundred yards along the ground and upwards. And I think we have things like that only of Earthly origin right in the atmosphere now. And I don't think that our breathing and walking and living right through them means a thing to them at all. But they objected to the invaders from space. They smelled differently, they were different, they must have come from a different sort of planet, a planet cooler than ours with deserts and vegetation different from our own. And they would have tried to remake our atmosphere into one of their own. And our native air-dwellers stopped them.

That's what I think.

Omega

by Amelia Reynolds Long

Insofar as all men are mortal and foredoomed to death, and as far back as history and myth can pierce we are impressed with the similar mortality of cities and peoples and kingdoms, it is quite natural that the death of the world is a subject that would engage the thoughts of the imaginative. In Amelia Reynolds Long's story, the subject is approached in an intriguing fashion. Without stirring from their own time, without a "time machine," the characters of "Omega" manage to get a vision of things to come—to share those experiences as well.

I, DOCTOR MICHAEL CLAYBRIDGE, living in the year 1926, have listened to a description of the end of the world from the lips of the man who witnessed it; the last man of the human race. That this is possible, or that I am not insane, I cannot ask you to believe: I can only offer you the facts.

For a long time my friend, Prof. Mortimer, had been experimenting with what he termed his theory of mental time; but I had known nothing of the nature of this theory until one day, in response to his request, I visited him at his laboratory. I found him bending over a young medical student, whom he had put into a state of hypnotic trance.

"A test of my theory, Claybridge," he whispered excitedly as I entered. "A moment ago I suggested to Bennet that this was the date of the battle of Waterloo. For him, it accordingly became so; for he described for me—and in French, mind you—a part of the battle at which he was present!"

"Present!" I exclaimed. "You mean that he is a reincarnation of—?"

"No, no," he interrupted impatiently. "You forget—or rather, you do not know—that time is a circle, all of whose parts are coexistent. By hypnotic suggestion, I moved his personality line until it became tangent with the Waterloo segment of the circle. Whether in physical time the two have ever touched before, is of little matter."

Of course I understood nothing of this, but before I could ask for an explanation, he had turned back to his patient.

"Attila, the Hun, is sweeping down upon Rome with his hordes," he said. "You are with them. Tell me what you see."

For a moment, nothing happened; then before our very eyes, the young man's features seemed to undergo a change. His nose grew beak-shaped, while his forehead acquired a backward slant. His pale face became ruddy, and his eyes changed from brown to grey green. Suddenly he flung out his arms; and there burst from his lips a torrent of sounds of which Mortimer and I could make nothing except that they bore a strong resemblance to the old Teutonic languages.

Mortimer let this continue for a moment or so before he recalled the boy from his trance. To my surprise, young Bennet was, upon awakening, quite his usual self without any trace of Hun feature. He spoke, however, with a feeling of weariness.

"Now," I said when Mortimer and I were alone, "would you mind telling me what it is all about?"

He smiled. "Time," he began, "is of two kinds; mental and physical. Of these, mental is the real; physical the unreal; or, we might say, the instrument used to measure the real. And its measurement is gauged by intensity, not length."

"You mean—?" I asked, not sure that I followed him correctly.

"That real time is measured by the intensity with which we live it," he answered. "Thus a minute of mental time may, by the standards devised by man, be three hours deep, because we have lived it intensely; while an eon of mental time may embrace but half a day physically for reverse reasons."

"'A thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night,'" I murmured.

"Exactly," he said, "except that in mental time there is neither past nor future, but only a continuous present. Mental time, as I remarked a while ago, is an infinite circle with materiality a line running tangent to it. The point of tangency interprets it to the physical senses, and so creates what we call physical time. Since a line can be tangent to a circle at only one point, our physical existence is single. If it were possible, as some day it may be, to make the line bisect the circle, we shall lead two existences simultaneously.

"I have proven, as you saw in the case of Bennet just now, that the point of tangency between the time circle and the materiality line can be changed by hypnotic suggestion. An entirely satisfactory experiment, you must admit, and yet," he became suddenly dejected, "as far as the world is concerned, it proves absolutely nothing."

"Why not?" I asked. "Couldn't others witness such a demonstration as well as I?"

"And deem it a very nice proof of reincarnation," he shrugged. "No, Olybridge, it won't do. There is but one proof the world would consider, the transfer of a man's consciousness to the future."

"Cannot that be done?" I queried.

"Yes," he said. "But there is connected with it an element of danger. Mental status has a strong effect upon the physical being, as was witnessed by Bennet's reversion to the Hun type. Had I kept him in the hypnotic state for too long a period, the Teutonic cast of features would not have vanished with his awakening. What changes a projection into the future would bring, I cannot say; and for that reason he is naturally unwilling that I experiment upon him in that direction."

He strode up and down the floor of his laboratory as he talked. His head was slumped forward upon his breast, as if heavy with the weight of thought.

"Then satisfactory proof is impossible?" I asked. "You can never hope to convince the world?"

He stopped with a suddenness that was startling, and his head went up with a jerk. "No!" he cried. "I have not given up! I must have a subject for my experiments, and I shall proceed to find one."

This determined statement did not particularly impress me at the time, nor, for that matter, did the time theory itself. Both were recalled to me a week or so later, when, in answer to his summons, I again visited Mortimer at the laboratory, and he thrust a newspaper into my hands, pointing to an item among the want ads.

"Wanted —" I read, "A subject for hypnotic experiment. $5,000 for the right man. Apply Pro. Alex Mortimer, Mortimer Laboratories, City."

"Surely," I exclaimed, "you do not expect to receive an answer to that?"

"On the contrary," he smiled, "I have received no less than a dozen answers. From them I chose the one who is most likely to prove the best subject. He will be here in a few minutes to sign the documents absolving me from any responsibility in case of accident. That is why I sent for you."

I could only stare at him.

"Of course," he went on, "I explained to him that there would be a degree of personal risk involved, but he appeared not to care. On the contrary, he seemed almost to welcome it. He--"

A knock at the door interrupted him. In response to his call, one of his assistants looked in.

"Mr. Williams is here, Professor."

"Send him in, Gable." As the assistant disappeared, Mortimer turned back to me. "My prospective subject," he explained. "He is prompt."

A thin, rather undersized man entered the room. My attention was at once drawn to his eyes, which seemed too large for his face.

"Mr. Williams, my friend, Dr. Claybridge," Mortimer introduced us. "The doctor is going to witness these articles we have to sign."

Williams acknowledged the introduction in a voice that sounded infinitely tired.

"Here are the papers," Mortimer said, pushing a few sheets of paper across the table toward him.

Williams merely glanced at them, and picked up a pen.

"Just a minute," Mortimer rang for Gable. The [illegible] and I witnessed the signature, and affixed our names below it.

"I am ready to begin immediately, if you like," Williams said when Gable had gone.

Mortimer eyed him reflectively for a moment. "First," he said, "there is a question I should like to ask you, Mr. Williams. You need not answer if you feel disinclined. Why are you so eager to undergo an experiment, the outcome of which even I cannot foresee?"

"If I answer that, will my answer be treated as strictly confidential?" asked Williams, casting a sidelong glance in my direction.

"Most certainly," Mortimer replied. "I speak for both myself and Dr. Claybridge." I nodded affirmation.

"Then," said Williams, "I will tell you. I welcome this experiment because, as you pointed out yesterday, there is a possibility of its resulting in my death. No, you did not say so in so many words, Prof. Mortimer, but that is the fear at the back of your mind. And why should I wish to die? Because, gentlemen, I have committed murder."

"What!" We barked out the word together.

Williams smiled wanly at our amazement. "That is rather an unusual statement, isn't it?" he asked in his tired voice. "Whom I murdered does not matter. The police will never find me out, for I was clever about it in order that my sister, to whom your $5,000, Professor, is to be paid, need not suffer from the humiliation of my arrest. But although I can escape the authorities, I cannot escape my own conscience. The knowledge that I have deliberately killed a man, even while he merited death, is becoming too much for me; and since my religion forbids suicide, I have turned to you as a possible way out. I think that is all."

We stared at him in silence. What Mortimer was thinking, I do not know. Most likely he was pondering upon the strange psychology of human conduct. As for me, I could not help wondering in what awful, perhaps pitiable tragedy this little man had been an actor.

Mortimer was the first to speak. When he did so, it was with no reference to what we had just heard. "Since you are ready, Mr. Williams, we will proceed with our initial experiment at once," he said. "I have arranged a special room for it, where there will be no other thought waves nor suggestions to disturb you."

He rose, and was apparently about to lead the way to this room when the telephone rang.

"Hello," he called into the transmitter. "Dr. Claybridge? Yes, he is here. Just a minute." He pushed the instrument towards me.

My hospital was on the wire. After taking the message, I hung up in disgust. "An acute case of appendicitis," I announced. "Of course I'm sorry for the poor devil, but he certainly chose an inopportune time for his attack."

"I will phone you all about the experiment," Mortimer promised as I reached for my hat. "Perhaps you can be present at the next one."

True to his promise, he rang me up that evening.

"I have had wonderful success!" he cried exultantly. "So far I have experimented only in a small way, but at that my theory has been proven beyond the possibility of doubt. And there was one most interesting feature, Claybridge. Williams told me what would be the nature of my experiment tomorrow afternoon."

"And what will it be?" I asked.

"I am to make his material consciousness tangent with the end of the world," was the astonishing answer.

"Good heavens!" I cried in spite of myself. "Shall you do it?"

"I have no choice in the matter," he replied.

"Mortimer, you fatalist! You—"

"No, no," he protested. "It is not fatalism. Can't you understand that—"

But I interrupted him. "May I be present?" I asked.

"Yes," he answered. "You will be there. Williams saw you."

I had a good mind to deliberately *not* be there, just to put a kink in his precious theory; but my curiosity was too great, and at the appointed time, I was on hand.

"I have already put Williams to sleep," Mortimer said as I came in. "He is in my especially prepared room. Come and I will show him to you."

He led me down a long hall to a door which I knew had originally given upon a storeroom. Inserting a key in the lock, he turned it, and flung the door open.

In the room beyond, I could see Williams seated in a swivel chair. His eyes were closed and his body relaxed, as if in sleep. However, it was not he that awakened my interest, but the room itself. It was windowless, with only a skylight in the ceiling to admit light and air. Aside from the chair in which Williams sat, there was no furniture save an instrument resembling an immense telephone transmitter that a crane arm held about two inches from the hypnotized man's mouth, and a set of ear phones, such as a telephone operator wears, which were attached to his ears. But strangest of all, the walls, floors, and ceiling of the room were lined with a whitish metal.

"White lead," said Mortimer, seeing my eyes upon it; "the substance least conductive of thought waves. I want the subject to be as free as possible from outside thought influences, so that when he talks with me over that telephonic device, which is connected with my laboratory, there can be no danger of his telling me any but his own experiences."

"But the skylight," I pointed out. "It is partially open."

"True," he admitted. "But thought waves, like sound waves, travel upwards, and outwards, rarely, if ever, downwards. So, you see, there is little danger from the skylight."

He closed and locked the door, and we went back to the laboratory. In one corner was what looked like a radio loud speaker, while near it was a transmitter similar to the one in the room with Williams.

"I shall speak to Williams through the transmitter," explained Mortimer, "and he shall hear me by means of the ear phones. When he answers into his transmitter, we will hear him through the loud speaker."

He seated himself before the apparatus and spoke: "Williams, do you hear me?"

"I hear you." The reply came promptly, but in the heavy tones of a man talking in his sleep.

"Listen to me. You are living in the last six days of the earth. By 'days,' I do not mean periods of twenty four hours, but such lengths of time as are meant in the first chapter of the book of Genesis. It is now the first day of the six. Tell me what you see."

After a short interval, the answer came in a strange, high key. While the words were English, they were spoken with a curious intonation that was at first difficult to understand.

"This is the year 16,812," said the voice, "or, in modern time, 13,930 A. I. C., After Interplanetary Communication. It is not well upon the earth. The Polar Ice Cap comes down almost to Newfoundland. Summer lasts but a few weeks, and then its heat is scorching. What in early time was known as the Atlantic Coastal Plain has long ago sunken into the sea. High dykes must be used to keep the water from covering the island of Manhattan, where the world's government is located. A great war has just concluded. There are many dead to bury."

"You speak of interplanetary communication," said Mortimer. "Is the world, then, in communication with the planets?"

"In the year 2,952," came the answer, "the earth succeeded in getting into communication with Mars. Radio pictures were sent back and forth between the two worlds until they learned each other's languages; then sound communication was established. The Martians had been trying to signal the earth since the beginning of the twentieth century, but were unable to set up a system of communication because of the insufficient scientific advancement of the Earthmen.

"About a thousand years later, a message was received from Venus, which had now advanced to the earth's state of civilization, when Mars was signalled. For nearly five hundred years they had been receiving messages from both the earth and Mars, but had been unable to answer.

"A little over five thousand years later, a series of sounds was received which seemed to come from somewhere beyond Venus. Venus and Mars heard them too; but, like us, were able to make nothing of them. All three worlds broadcasted their radio pictures on the wave length corresponding to that of the mysterious sounds, but received no answer. At last Venus advanced the theory that the sounds had come from Mercury, whose inhabitants, obliged to live upon the side of their world farther from the sun, would be either entirely without sight or with eyes not sufficiently developed to see our pictures.

"Recently something dire has happened to Mars. Our last messages from her told of terrible wars and pestilences, such as we are now having upon earth. Also, her water supply was beginning to give out, due to the fact that she was obliged to use much of it in the manufacture of atmosphere. Suddenly, about fifty years ago, all messages from her ceased, and upon signalling her, we received no answer."

Mortimer covered the transmitter with his hand. "That," he said to me, "can mean only that intelligent life upon Mars had become extinct. The earth, then, can have but a few thousand years yet to go."

For nearly an hour longer he quizzed Williams upon conditions of the year 46,812. All the answers showed that while scientific knowledge had reached an almost incredulous stage of advancement, the race of mankind was in its twilight. Wars had killed off thousands of people, while strange, new diseases found hosts of victims daily in a race whose members were no longer physically constituted to withstand them. Worst of all, the birth rate was rapidly diminishing.

"Listen to me." Mortimer raised his voice as if to impress his invisible subject with what he was about to say. "You are now living in the second day. Tell me what you see."

There was a moment or so of silence; then the voice, keyed even higher than before, spoke again.

"I see humanity in its death-throes," it said. "Only a few scattered tribes remain to roam over the deserted continents. The cattle have begun to sicken and die; and it is unsafe to use them for food. Four thousand years ago, we took to the manufacture of artificial air, as did the Martians before us. But it is hardly worth while, for children are no longer born. We shall be the last of our race."

"Have you received no recent word from Mars?" asked Mortimer.

"None. Two years ago, at her proper season, Mars failed to appear in the heavens. As to what has become of her, we can only conjecture."

There was a horrible suggestiveness about this statement. I shuddered, and noticed that Mortimer did, also.

"The Polar Ice Cap has begun to retreat," resumed the voice. "Now it is winters that are short. Tropical plants have begun to appear in the temperate zones. The lower forms of animal life are becoming more numerous, and have begun to pursue man as man once pursued them. The days of the human race are definitely numbered. We are a band of strangers upon our own world."

"Listen to me," said Mortimer again. "It is now the third day. Describe it."

Followed the usual short interval of silence, then came the voice, fairly brittle with freezing terror.

"Why," it screamed, "do you keep me here, the last living man upon a dying planet? The world is teeming with dead things. Let me be dead with them."

"Mortimer," I interrupted, "this is awful! Hasn't your experiment gone far enough?"

He pushed back his chair and rose. "Yes," he said, a bit shakily, I thought. "For the present, at least. Come, I will awaken Williams."

I followed him down the hall, and was close upon his heels, when he flung open the door of the lead-lined room, and stepped inside. Our cries of surprised alarm were simultaneous.

In the chair where we had left him sat Williams, but physically he was a different man. He had shrunken several inches in stature, while his head appeared to have grown larger, with the forehead almost bulbous in aspect. His fingers were extremely long and sensitive, but suggestive of great strength. His frame was thin to emaciation.

"Good Heavens!" I gasped. "What has happened?"

"It is an extreme case of mental influence upon matter," answered Mortimer, bending over the hypnotized man. "You remember how young Bennet's features took on the characteristics of a Hun? A similar thing, but in a much intenser degree, has happened to Williams. He has become a man of the future physically as well as mentally."

"Good Lord!" I cried. "Waken him at once! This is horrible."

"To be frank with you," said Mortimer gravely, "I am afraid to. He has been in this state much longer than I realized. To waken him too suddenly would be dangerous. It might even prove fatal."

For a moment he seemed lost in thought. Then he removed the ear phones from Williams' head, and addressed him. "Sleep," he commanded. "Sleep soundly and naturally. When you have rested sufficiently, you will awaken and be your normal self."

Shortly after this, I left Mortimer, and, although it was my day off duty, went to my hospital. How good my commonplace tonsil cases seemed after the unholy things I had just experienced! I surprised the resident physician almost into a state of coma by putting in the remainder of the day in the hardest work possible in the free clinic; and finally went home, tired in mind and body.

I turned in early for what I deemed a well-earned rest, and fell asleep instantly. The next thing of which I was conscious was the insistent ringing of the telephone bell beside my bed.

"Hello," I cried sleepily, taking down the receiver. "Dr. Claybridge speaking."

"Claybridge, this is Mortimer," came the almost hysterical response. "For God's sake, come over to the laboratory at once!"

"What has happened?" I demanded, instantly wide awake. It would take something unusual to wring such excitement from the unemotional Mortimer.

"It's Williams," he answered. "I can't bring him back. He got awake about an hour ago, and still believes that he is living in the future. Physically, he is the same as he was when last you saw him this afternoon."

"I'll be over at once," I fairly shouted, and slammed the receiver down upon its hook. As I scrambled into my clothes, I glanced at the clock. Two fifteen. In half an hour I could reach the laboratory. What would I find waiting for me?

Mortimer was in the lead room with Williams when I arrived.

"Claybridge," he said, "I need someone else's opinion in this case. Look at him, and tell me what you think."

Williams still occupied the chair in the middle of the room. His eyes were wide open, but it was plain that he saw neither Mortimer nor me. Even when I bent over him and touched him, he gave no sign of being conscious of my presence.

"He looks as if he were suffering from some sort of catalepsy," I said, "yet his temperature and pulse are almost normal. I should say that he is still partially in a state of hypnosis."

"Then it is self hypnosis," said Mortimer, "for I have entirely withdrawn my influence."

"Perhaps," I suggested lightly, "you have transported him irretrievably into the future."

"That," Mortimer replied, "is precisely what I fear has happened."

I stared at him dumbly.

"The only way out," he went on, "is to rehypnotize him, and finish the experiment. At its conclusion, he may return to his natural state."

I could not help thinking that there were certain things which it was forbidden man to know; and that Mortimer, having wantonly blundered into them, was now being made to pay the penalty. I watched him as he worked over poor Williams, straining all his energies to induce a state of hypnotic sleep. At last the glassy eyes before him closed, and his subject slept. With hands that trembled visibly, he adjusted the earphones, and we went back to the laboratory.

"Williams," Mortimer called into his transmitter, "do you hear me?"

"I hear you," replied the odiously familiar voice.

"You are now living in the fourth day. What do you see?"

"I see reptiles; great lizards that walk upon their hind legs, and birds with tiny heads and bats' wings, that build nests in the ruins of the deserted cities."

"Dinosaurs and pterodactyls!" I gasped involuntarily. "A second age of reptiles!"

"The Polar caps have retreated until there is but a small area of ice about each of the poles," continued the voice. "There are no longer any seasons; only a continuous reign of heat. The torrid zone has become uninhabitable even by the reptiles. The sea there boils. Great monsters writhe in their death agonies upon its surface. Even the northern waters are becoming heated.

"All the land is covered with rank vegetation upon which the reptiles feed. The air is fetid with it."

Mortimer interrupted. "Describe the fifth day."

After the customary interval, the voice replied. There was a sticky quality about it that reminded me of the sucking of mud at some object struggling in it.

"The reptiles are gone," it said. "I alone live upon this expiring world. Even the plant life has turned yellow and withered. The volcanoes are in terrific action. The mountains are becoming level, and soon all will be one vast plain. A thick, green slime is gathering upon the face of the waters; so that it is difficult to tell where the land with its rotting vegetation ends and the sea begins. The sky is saffron in color, like a plate of hot brass. At night a blood red moon swims drunkenly in a black sky.

"Something is happening to gravitation. For a long time I had suspected it. Today I tested it by throwing a stone into the air. I was carried several feet above the ground by the force of my action. It took the stone nearly twenty minutes to return to earth. It fell slowly, *and at an angle!*"

"An angle!" cried Mortimer.

"Yes. It was barely perceptible, but it was there. The earth's movement is slowing. Days and nights have more than doubled in length."

"What is the condition of the atmosphere?"

"A trifle rarefied, but not sufficiently so to make breathing difficult. This seems strange to me."

"That," said Mortimer to me, "is because his body is here in the twentieth century, where there is plenty of air. The air at the stage of the earth's career where his mind is would be too rare to support organic life. Even now the mental influence is so strong that he believes the density of the atmosphere to be decreasing."

"Recently," Williams' voice went on, "the star Vega has taken Polaris' place as centre of the universe. Many of the old stars have disappeared, while new ones have taken their places. I have a suspicion that our solar system is either falling or traveling in a new direction through space."

"Listen to me, Williams." Mortimer's voice sounded dry and cracked, and his forehead was besprinkled with great gouts of sweat. "It is the sixth, the last day. What do you see?"

"I see a barren plain of grey rock. The world is in perpetual twilight because the mists that rise from the sea obscure the sun. Heaps of brown bones dot the plain near the mounds that once were cities. The dykes around Manhattan long ago crumbled away; but there is no longer any need for them even were men here, for the sea is rapidly drying up. The atmosphere is becoming exceedingly rarefied. I can hardly breathe. . . .

"Gravitation is giving out more rapidly. When I stand erect I sway as though drunk. Last night the curtains of mist parted for a time, and I saw the moon fly off into space.

"Great lightnings play about the earth, but there is no thunder. The silence all around is plummetless. I keep speaking aloud and striking one object against another to relieve the strain on my eardrums. . . .

"Great cracks are beginning to appear in the ground, from which smoke and molten lava issue. I have fled to Manhattan in order that the skeletons of the tall buildings may hide them from my sight.

"Small objects have begun to move of their own volition. I am afraid to walk, as each step hurls me off my balance. The heat is awful. I cannot breathe."

There was a short interval, that came as a relief to our tightly screwed nerves. The tension to which the experiment had pitched us was terrific, yet I, for one, could no more have torn myself away than I could have passed into the fourth dimension.

Suddenly the voice cut the air like a knife!

"The buildings!" it shrieked. "They are swaying! They are leaning toward each other! They are crumbling, disintegrating; and the crumbs are flying *[illegible] falling!* Tiny particles are being thrown off by everything around me. Oh, the heat! There is no air!"

Followed a hideous gurgling; then:

"The earth is dissolving beneath my feet! It is the end. Creation is returning to its original atoms! Oh, my God!" There was a sickening scream that rapidly grew fainter with the effect of fading on radio.

"Williams!" shouted Mortimer. "What happened?"

There was no answer.

"Williams! Williams!" Mortimer was on his feet, fairly shrieking into the instrument. "Do you hear me?"

The only response was utter silence.

Mortimer clutched me by the arm, and dragged me with him from the laboratory and down the hall.

"Is—is he dead?" I choked as we ran.

Mortimer did not answer. His breath was coming in quick, short gasps that would have made speech impossible even had he heard me.

At the door of the lead room he stopped and fumbled with his keys. From behind we could hear no sound. Twice Mortimer, in his nervousness and haste, dropped the key and had to grope for it; but at last he got it turned in the lock, and flung the door open.

In our haste, we collided with each other as we hurtled into the room. Then, as one man, we stopped dead in our tracks. The room was empty!

"Where is he?" I breathed incredulously. "He couldn't have gotten out! Could he?"

"No," Mortimer answered hoarsely.

We stepped, together, farther into the room, peering into every crack and corner. From the back of the chair, suspended by their cord, hung the earphones. Stretching from the chair's seat to the floor were the tattered and partly charred remnants of what seemed to have been at one time a suit of men's clothing. At sight of these, Mortimer's face went white. In his eyes was a look of dawning comprehension and horror.

"What does it mean?" I demanded.

For answer, he pointed a palsied finger.

As I looked, the first beam of morning sunlight slipped through the skylight above us, and fell obliquely to the floor. In its golden shaft, directly above the chair where Williams had sat, a myriad of infinitesimal atoms were dancing.

THE END

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